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VALENTINE

BY GRANT RICHARDS



Julie Foye House

Richards

NCW



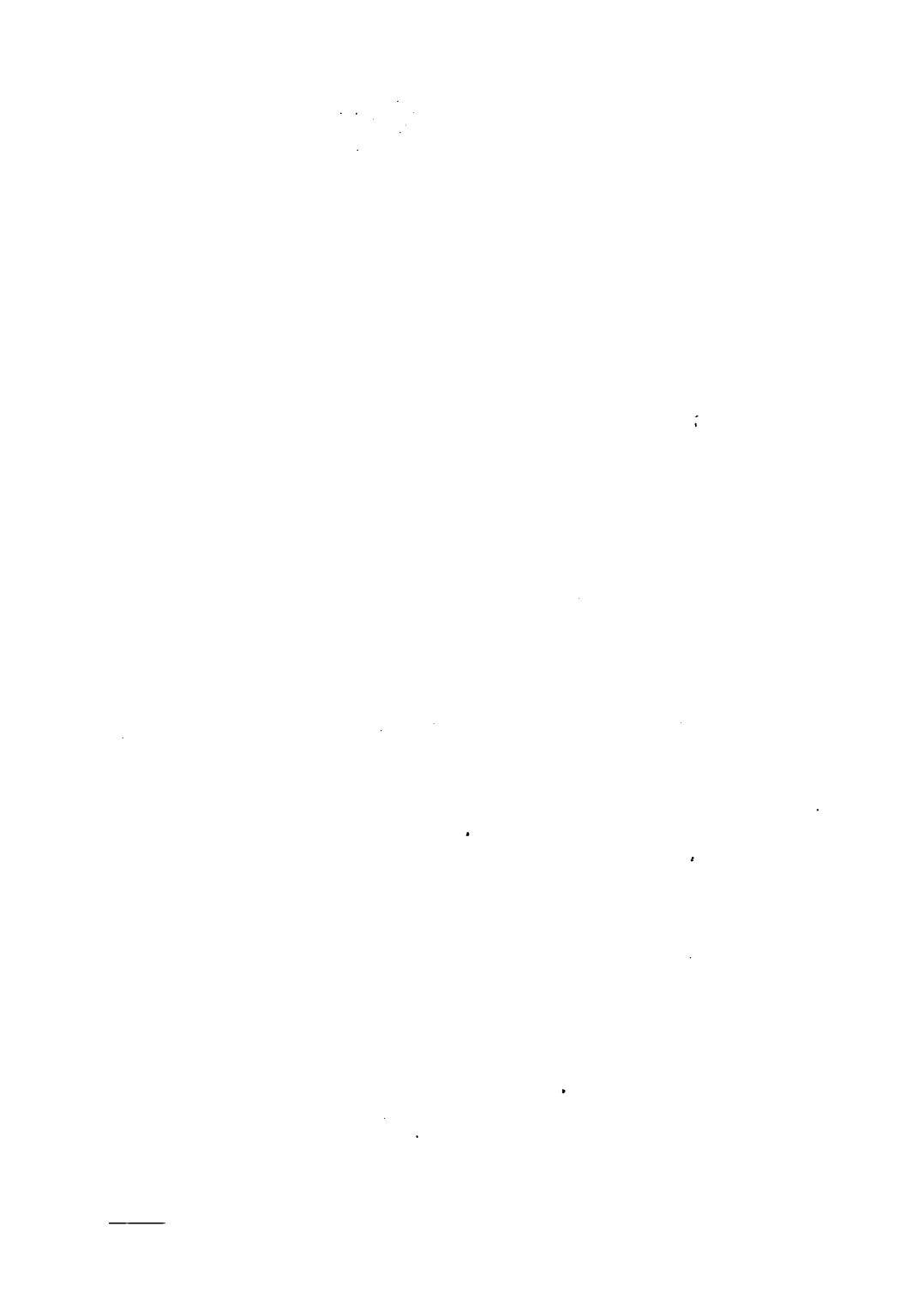


By Grant Richards

VALENTINE.
CAVIARE. Illustrated.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

VALENTINE



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VALENTINE

BY
GRANT RICHARDS
Author of "Caviare"

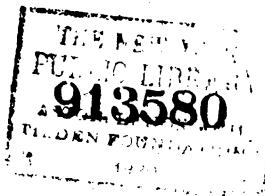


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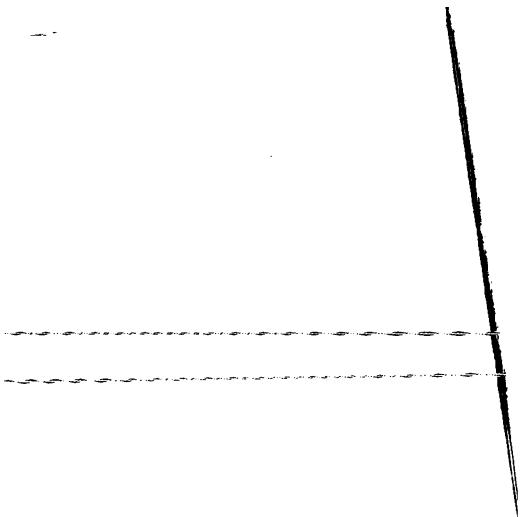
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Published October 1913

WHY NOT
ALKALI
WATER?

TO
THAT ANONYMOUS BUT NOT UNKINDLY CRITIC
TO ME UNKNOWN
WHO IN PRINT INVITED ME "TO TRY AGAIN"
I DEDICATE WHATEVER THERE MAY BE
OF MERIT IN THIS BOOK



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BOOK I

“Most youths are like Pope’s women; they have no character at all.”

EVAN HARRINGTON.

VALENTINE

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE READER IS TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT
VALENTINE BARAT

VALENTINE BARAT was English, very English, English in all his ideas, sympathies, prejudices, a very John Bull mentally. But all the same he had something of a foreign air, a heritage, no doubt, from some ancestor whom his father had forgotten or of whom he knew too little to speak. Valentine would have asked for information, would have searched for it in his talk with his father, but the older man did n't invite such intimate conversation. Father and son gossiped with one another hardly at all. Upright, rather dour, with a perfectly charming smile which was yours, so to speak, for the asking, if you were doing exactly what he wanted you to do, Barat Senior — Harvey Barat, sole partner in the famous firm of Bellew and Barat, architects, of Great College Street, Westminster — thought of little else than his work. He did n't pay, and never had paid, very much attention to his son, and few things would have surprised him more than Valentine's breaking through that habit of reserve which characterised all their relations and going to the length of displaying to him an active curiosity in something

he had not himself chosen for comment and investigation.

The faults — if they were faults — that lay at the bottom of this lack of cordiality — no, that is not quite the right word: what I mean is something between cordiality and expansiveness — were not all on the father's side. Valentine had the sense to know that he had himself to blame not a little; he could have broken through if he'd tried. It would have been difficult . . . and then a boy's heart doesn't warm in quite the right way to a father who has always held aloof. Mr. Barat had always left, as long as Valentine could remember, all his son's upbringing to others, content if he himself were not bothered, satisfied if the child came his way no more than was necessary, and if when he came he looked clean and kept his peace. The truth was that Mr. Harvey Barat resented boys. The children in his ideal world would all have been girls.

When Mrs. Barat died, however, this relation between father and son suffered some change. Inevitably, since Valentine was now of an age to think for himself and could no longer be treated as a child, they came to see more of one another, to be more together, to talk with little constraint on subjects of no personal importance. But as I have said, Valentine would not have dared, or would not have thought it worth while, to outrage his habits in order to ask his father about such a matter as his ancestry. It sounds almost absurd, but such barriers do grow up between parent and child, and anyhow the knowledge that Valentine lacked is really immaterial to my story. It is enough that somewhere in the past had

been a foreign mother, a Latin it may safely be supposed. But this had nothing to do with his rather foreign-looking surname. That he knew, for his mother had told him.

"Why, mummy," he'd asked, "do we spell our name so? There's another Barat at school, but he spells his name altogether differently."

"Hush, dear, I'll tell you, — but don't speak of it before your father. Your great-grandfather spelt his name in the usual way — not as we do; but your grandfather dropped the letters he thought unnecessary. He said it looked better — and so I think it does. He was rather a poet. But your father says he's ashamed of such nonsense, and has threatened a dozen times to change back again — so I don't want him to hear you speak of it."

A patient, rather weary soul, Mrs. Barat left her husband and son when Valentine was in his third year at Balliol. Her death was sudden and on the very eve of the Christmas vacation. Valentine reached home too late even to wish her good-bye. It was his first experience of the kind, and it sobered him. He said to himself that henceforward he'd devote himself to his father's comfort and happiness, that he'd make his father pleased with him, proud of him. But they returned from Golder's Green and Mr. Barat took up his daily tale of work, and there was little change other than that of which I have already spoken. Morning after morning as they sat at breakfast in the electric light Valentine would look at his father and wonder whether ever as long as he lived they would have a real talk. . . . And surely, too, it was high

time now for him to decide on a future. Since he had been a little boy and had dreamed of becoming an engine-driver that subject had never been raised. Mrs. Barat hadn't had the enterprise to tackle anything so important and Valentine until recently had been content to let things slide. Before he went back to Oxford, however, it was settled that unless he had some serious reason for changing his mind he should go into his father's firm. That would be following the line of least resistance. It sounded natural. The business was there; there was no one else to carry it on. And Valentine liked architecture. The idea of planning large and beautiful houses attracted him. The matter was left rather vague, but it was understood that as far as Oxford allowed he was to work at the groundwork of his future profession.

If Mr. Barat was an uninterested, an unaffectionate father, he was at least tolerant. He let Valentine alone. His allowance was sufficient, and he could spend it as he would — and he did, overspent it in fact, adding every term to a crop of debts in Oxford and in London that gave his sanguine nature less trouble than was suitable. Not that there was any particular vice in him. Twenty-two now, he was, so far at least, without serious defects of character or conduct. At Oxford he rowed, and drank wine, and cultivated a taste in clothes, making himself thereby not a little unusual in a time when any old thing does. . . . He smoked, too, and yet wouldn't smoke a pipe — "It's such a fag keeping the beastly thing alight" — and when he was in town refused to ride in anything but the easy hansom, save when he had to

SOMETHING ABOUT VALENTINE 7

defer to his mother's insistence that an omnibus was nearly as quick, and being cheaper was so much more sensible.

For the rest, Valentine Barat could not have been called a worker. He was out of his element at Balliol. He read a little for his schools and a great deal for his amusement, and in spite of his years, and because no doubt of the quiet life he lived when at home, he remained very young.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE RUE FONTAINE ELUDING DISCOVERY IS FOUND AT LAST AND THE PROPERTIES AND EFFECTS OF ABSINTHE ARE EXHIBITED

“ . . . And so, Sir, if you have no objection, I think that when I come down next week I’ll spend only a couple of nights at home and will then go to Paris for a week. I think it will do me good. I’ve never been out of England, and I’m sure I ought to know at first hand something of French architecture—although that’s only one reason, of course!”

Mr. Barat laid Valentine’s letter down beside his plate and turned to the “Times.” It did n’t require any consideration. If his son wanted to go to Paris he could go: it was his business. Besides it would save any lengthy alteration of his own way of living. It was all very well to have Valentine at home, all very well in theory, but in practice it was rather a nuisance. Mr. Barat disliked finding the lights turned on in an empty room; he particularly disliked coming across books here and there in the house for whose presence he could n’t account; it worried him to have the paper taken up directly he put it down, and even more it worried him when Valentine, realising this, ordered a second and cheaper paper for himself and even went to the length

of littering the house with another journal in the evening.

His breakfast finished, Mr. Barat went to his writing desk: —

DEAR VALENTINE: By all means go to Paris if you wish. There is very little in it that would interest me nowadays, but you may like it. You will find me here as usual when you arrive next week and I shall be pleased to see you. A visit to Paris is more expensive than stopping quietly at home, so I shall contribute a ten-pound note to your fund. Your affectionate father,

HARVEY BARAT.

P.S. Your cousin, Colin, is at school just outside Paris. It will please your aunt if you see him.

Valentine received this letter when he came in from the river on the same afternoon and breathed a sigh of relief. "The old chap's all right if you take him in the proper way," he said to himself. The sigh of relief was for the promise of the ten-pound note. He had arranged his visit to Paris without much idea of how he was going to pay for it. Ten pounds would help a lot.

Having had the normal and expensive education of the young English gentleman, having been to Charterhouse and to Oxford, Valentine did n't know any French at all, or rather he did n't know any French which would be of real value on this first visit of his to the Continent. He could read you a page of Molière with tolerable ease, but he could n't order a dinner or ask his way. And so

when he found himself at the Gare du Nord he was glad to have the address of a hotel so clearly written down that he was saved the necessity of arguing with the *cocher*. A black and white artist whom he'd met two or three times in London and who had taken something of a fancy to him had given him this, and had given him, too, a letter of introduction couched in terms quite cheerful and cordial to a man of his own age, one Basil Enthoven, who was studying painting, and who he said would be delighted to show Valentine round. Save for this letter and the address of his young, fourteen-year-old cousin, Valentine was without ties. It was as well, he thought: he'd have more time to do the things he wanted to do. There was the Louvre, and there were all the churches, and he wanted to go to the races when Sunday came.

That night Valentine dined in his hotel — a little place off the rue Boissy d'Anglas — walked for a while in the rue Royale, looked curiously at the strange crowds, and went betimes to bed.

Oh, the ecstasy of one's first awakening in Paris! The sun shines in at the open windows, perhaps birds sing, the shabby roofs encompassing the view have some strange romance in their lines — and the coffee with the two little rolls, one round and hard, the other soft and yet crisp, such coffee, the very coffee that when you know Paris better you get to hate, that early morning coffee and milk that tastes that first morning like some undreamt-of nectar.

Valentine fingered his Baedeker. It would be pretty simple by the aid of the maps at its end to find

his friend's friend. It would be a good idea to do that first. He'd been told Enthoven was always working, and would therefore be accessible, in the morning. The rue Fontaine was somewhere here in this square of the map, on the other side of the river evidently, near the boulevard Manet. He dressed humming to himself and went out smiling into the sunshine. It was an easy business to get to the river, but it was not an easy business to find the boulevard Manet, and the rue Fontaine did n't seem to exist at all. The map appeared to be bewitched. It was true it did n't show the exact street he wanted, but its index indicated that it was in Square No. 15, and that was crossed by the boulevard Manet. But where was that thoroughfare? It should be here, but it was n't. Something was evidently wrong. Valentine was on the point of giving up the search when he came across a street that certainly crossed the boulevard he was looking for. He went up it. No boulevard. At last he summoned up his little French to ask for it. Of course he did n't get a simple answer, but some lengthy exposition that he followed not at all. He did gather, though, that the boulevard was hereabouts, in this direction and in that.

"Really, it is the rue Fontaine I want, Monsieur," he dared and managed to add. And that settled it. His informant ceased to be even remotely useful; he had so many things to say. As soon as he could, Valentine disengaged himself and made one more unaided attempt, fruitlessly. If he had not been English and stubborn, he'd have written the address he wanted down on a piece of paper and have shown it to a cabman. But he

would n't do that. He'd find the place next day with the aid of his cousin, who, as it was the Sabbath, was to come to him early and spend with him all the hours of daylight at least.

And in the morning the cousin came and found Valentine still in bed, fast asleep, indeed. He was a smooth-faced lad, a little unimportant and well-meaning and very curious and very good-natured and anxious to be of assistance. Eton-jacketed, too, with a wide-spread collar of the same family. Under his bowler hat and with his pink cheeks he looked a triple extract of his native land.

"Before we do anything else," Valentine said, as he yawned himself from between the clothes, "I want you to take me to the boulevard Manet — here it is, see, on the map."

The young Colin, who knew, if the truth was told, rather less about Paris than his cousin, looked and said that there'd be no difficulty, and they started out to cover the same ground as Valentine had covered yesterday and to court the same experience.

"I can't understand this at all," Colin had at last to confess. "The boulevard should be here — but it is n't. Stop, I'll ask that *agent*."

And the boy's French saved the situation, for after listening to a harangue that seemed to last ten minutes, it was explained to Valentine that the boulevard Manet was not yet built, that it existed only in the plans of the successors of Hausmann, and that evidently the map-draughtsman had been indulging in intelligent anticipation.

"Yes, I see all that" — for it took Valentine hardly a moment to recover his bearings — "but it does n't take me where I want to go. Please go back and tell him that it's really the rue Fontaine we're looking for."

Colin did as he was bid, and returned to explain rather sheepishly that the rue Fontaine was right at the other side of Paris, on the slopes of Montmartre.

Valentine swore — under his breath because of his youthful companion — and called a cab. "Restaurant Foyot" he managed to say, and although the man, seeing that his fares were English, pretended not to understand, they reached ultimately that fading shrine of the true gourmet. There, two heads being better than one, they discovered that Valentine had only himself to blame for his adventures and loss of time. It was true that the boulevard Manet was prematurely drawn, but now that he had properly mastered the Baedeker system he realised that even when it existed it would have nothing to say to a street so remote as that for which he was searching.

Lunch over and after a visit to the hotel to change into a morning coat and silk hat — clothes which Valentine felt were more suitable to a foreign capital of so much fashion — and after a visit to Monna Lisa and Notre Dame, the two lads — for in truth Valentine was little more — turned their faces to the north. This time they would arrive. Their way led them past the Galeries, beloved of all the women in Paris, visitor, grande dame, actress, English school-mistresses, cocotte or what you will. Then by the Chaussée d'Antin to the

Place de la Trinité where Montmartre may be said to begin, Montmartre, the Butte, that happier Venusberg, that home of the great and little arts, that gay and degraded, joyous and corroded parish of intellect and of the flesh.

Valentine, however, thought nothing of this. He knew of course all about Montmartre, all that one knows from books, but if he had paused to bother about the place at all, he would have expected it to look like some drawing made by Doré to illustrate the "Contes Drôlatiques" or like a glorified mediæval town from the Earl's Court Exhibition. Here as he started on the rue Blanche and, consulting his map,—divorced now from the book itself,—turned into the rue Pigalle, he saw little to remark. It was all very new to him, curious in its way, but quite bourgeois and unimportant and meanly commercial. And so it continued. Not yet were the webs spun for the fly. No lights marked at this early hour the haunts of gaiety.

Mr. Enthoven's concierge proclaimed him out. No, he would not yet have gone to dinner. This in answer to a halting inquiry from Valentine, who'd been told that if he did n't run the artist down at his home he'd surely be found at the Rochefoucauld or the Rat Mort, two restaurants of the quarter which he honoured with his constant patronage. Valentine might look for him at dinner in an hour, the good lady thought.

For a while then they were at a loose end. There at the end of the street, a little higher up, the eager Colin discerned the red sails of that mill which even yet is the haven of ignorant youth and of the travelling

Anglo-Saxon. So long does it take for a tradition to die! And being Sunday it was open. He suggested going to it. Nothing at the moment would have suited Valentine better, but he had a sense of responsibility. Chislehurst and the Moulin Rouge would go ill together. His aunt, as his father had said, would be pleased to hear that the cousins had met, but she would be far from pleased if she heard that her simple, clean-hearted son had been initiated into such Parisian gaieties. Besides it would be even better fun to walk about and to watch the people in the gathering twilight and then later to sit down outside some café and to try what absinthe was really like. Colin could have some tea, and should start for home immediately afterwards.

And so they walked about, gazing with curiosity and astonishment at the outside of Le Ciel and L'Enfer, searching, too, for the cabaret about which Arthur Symons had so recently written, the cabaret where Bruant sang, and ultimately they seated themselves among a score of family parties in front of the Brasserie Wepler in the Place Cléchy.

People looked at them with some surprise, but they did n't notice it. The waiter came for his order. Valentine indicated his young companion and commanded tea and, for himself, with some little trepidation, owing to his uncertainty of the pronunciation, absinthe.

The waiter looked interrogation and asked some question which Valentine did n't understand. It was repeated. People glanced their way. Valentine became hot. His cousin came to the rescue.

“He says will you have it pure?”

It was n't a time for reflection. Perhaps to have it "pure" would mean that it would be twice as dangerous, but "pure" it had better be, if for no other reason than that Valentine knew of no alternative.

"Oui," he said.

The tea was brought, and tasted, Valentine was told, like nothing else in the world but chopped straw. Tea on Montmartre! It might have been expected. And the absinthe was brought and a curious silver spoon-like implement was laid across the top of the glass and sugar was brought and a carafe of water with a great mass of ice in it that challenged speculation as to how it got into the bottle. If it had n't been for the spoon, Valentine would have bravely drunk the liquid as he would have drunk a glass of port, but the spoon flustered him. He felt — quite wrongly, by the way — that people were looking at him to see if he understood what he was doing. He engaged his cousin in conversation, lit a cigarette — and hoped that some one else would arrive and order the same drink, so that he might imitate his technique.

Patience was rewarded. Valentine learned all about it. And he also learned that absinthe is just about as disagreeably tasting a drink as he had ever experienced. "That vice is n't for me," he said to himself. But he finished his glass.

CHAPTER III

“MONSIEUR ENTHOVEN: EST-IL ICI?”

HOW beautiful Paris was! Valentine thought as he walked away from the Brasserie Wepler that he had never seen anything more exquisite than the fretwork of trees against the delicate blue of the darkening sky. And how interesting the people were, how pretty and laughing the women. He was glad Colin was with him. He'd never realised what a nice boy his cousin was. It was a pity he must go back to his school now. Still, it had been jolly having him there. He must come up again for another long day. What wonderful eyes the French girls had, and how friendly they looked, and what fun it was to see every one enjoying themselves so much. Why, he'd only been in Paris twenty-four hours, and already its air had changed the blood in his veins. He'd never felt so youthful, so full of ideas, so cheerful. He could walk about these streets all night.

“Colin, you ought to go home now. You told me we are n't far up here from your station. Trot. But come back again. Write to the Hôtel Tête. I don't want you to go, but they'll expel you if you are n't back soon.”

“Oh, let me stop and go somewhere with you — a theatre or something. Nothing'll happen. They don't know how to be strict at Versailles, even though old Father Bonnot does get in a wax now and then.”

"No, I won't. Go home! Your mother'd have a fit if she thought I kept you in Paris till midnight. I like to stand well with her as a guardian of youth. So trot, I say again."

"All right, I'll go; but had n't I better wait till you go to that restaurant to look for your friend? You won't know how to ask for him."

"Oh, yes, I shall. You're not going into any restaurants with me. I'll just say 'Monsieur Enthoven': that'll be enough."

"No, it won't." Colin was n't sure of much French himself, but he felt that Valentine's words were n't sufficiently interrogative or self-explanatory. "You must go in and you must say, 'Monsieur Enthoven: est-il ici?' and then they'll understand and look for him."

"Very well. I've got that: 'Monsieur Enthoven: est-il ici?' Now you'd better go."

But Colin was full of delays. Had n't he better wait and see the result of the search. His cousin might get into some difficulty from which superior French alone would extricate him. And Valentine felt too friendly, too much at peace with all the world, to object.

They found the Rochefoucauld. It was a shabby, empty little place in which there was no sign that any one ever dined. The lady who presided over a battered desk had never, it seemed, heard of Mr. Enthoven. It would perhaps be otherwise at the Rat Mort.

And it was — very otherwise, but not in the sense that Valentine wished. The Rat Mort was n't then what it is now — a very second-rate smart restaurant

full of noisy, *moche* people who have, most of them, spilled over from next door. It was then a very cheap, rather vicious, haunt of young painters and young ladies. One paid three or four francs for one's lunch or dinner, and wine — such wine! — was included. It was very gay, and I fancy it was the prototype of that restaurant which Mrs. Humphry Ward described, or was on the point of describing, in "David Grieve."

"Now stop outside," Valentine said, "and wait till I come out." Colin protested but did as he was told, and Valentine left him, pushing the door of the restaurant open, and hearing at once a great deal of noise, much laughter and clatter, and being for the moment dazzled by the light.

It is no more than justice to say that he made a rather creditable, if a very English, sight. His face was a little flushed, his brown hair a little ruffled and curling, his dark grey morning suit and patent boots were all as well fitting as Bond Street could achieve. As he entered, and according to his habit, he swung his silk hat from his head and looked round for some one to interrogate. But the waiters were far too busy to attend to him. There was n't a spare table. He must evidently walk to the length of the restaurant and ask the lady who seemed to be presiding over the feast.

"Monsieur Enthoven: est-il ici?"

"Monsieur Enthoven . . ." Valentine understood no more. The rest was in voluble French. He was expected to say something else evidently. He repeated his phrase. But the conversation did n't march as it should. The portly *dame de comptoir* just talked, and

Valentine looked at her and wondered what she was talking about. It was very embarrassing. . . . And then suddenly he realised that everybody was looking at him, really looking at him this time, guying him, perhaps, laughing at him, anyhow. He was an object of amusement to all those pretty ladies. He turned red, and would have liked to turn tail. He smiled at the throng. Some one, in pure friendship apparently, threw a piece of sugar at him; another, rather deftly, managed to pitch a roll into his hat. Every one addressed him. The lady at the desk smiled. Valentine would be equal to tackling any of the men who were sitting round, but he did n't know what to do to their cheerful, large-hatted companions.

And now confusion crowded on him. Arrived his young cousin, who, chafing at having to wait outside and fearing that Valentine might be finding embarrassment, had dared, after some delay, to disregard the instructions he had been given. Valentine turned to find Colin at his side. He knew how incongruous he himself was in his London clothes and his silk hat — but Colin! Heavens! A real "rag" seemed to impend. Not every day did the happy denizens of the Butte have such a treat. An Eton collar and an Eton suit, and a pink, clean-faced English boy: they gave the finishing touches to the scene.

Yet Colin was not ineffective. In halting French he explained that his friend did n't understand the language, but that he was looking for a Monsieur Enthoven who he had been told generally dined at the Rat Mort. Was he there now?

Comprehension dawned on the domestic face of Madame Rat Mort. Ah, yes, she would see — and a waiter was despatched to look about on the next floor and in the *cabinets*. Perhaps Monsieur Enthoven was there.

Colin explained to his cousin and was rewarded by being told to clear out and to stop out till he was rejoined. He vanished reluctantly, slowly. A piece of bread caught him in the nape of the neck as he went through the door.

An eternity seemed to pass before the waiter came back. If only he had been able to sit down Valentine would have been less embarrassed. He could have trifled with his pocket-book. Anything would have been better than having to stand like this, the cynosure of all those odd eyes, the target of all those jokes that he could n't understand. . . .

And then the waiter returned. Evidently Monsieur Enthoven was not to be found. Now to extricate himself. He would do it with some style. Calling the waiter back he put his hand into his pocket and drew out the first coin that came — a five-franc piece. That capped it. The waiter was astonished and the crowd cheered. A young girl jumped up and seized Valentine by the arm and addressed him in some friendly fashion. He felt he was popular. He would almost have liked to stop. But there was Colin to consider. He smiled at the little face which looked up at his and gently disengaged her hand. Then with a bow he went as rapidly as was seemly to the door and bowed again.

So that was the way people went on in Paris. Valentine rather liked it.

Having drawn blank at both Mr. Enthoven's reputed haunts, nothing remained to do but to leave the letter of introduction and a card with his concierge, to drop Colin at the Gare St. Lazare, to dine and to go to bed. But it was long before Valentine went to bed. He walked about. The night was moon-lighted; the empty streets seemed enchanted. If, as its enemies say, Paris is pinchbeck, a tawdry city, in this silver radiance, these defects of grain were not to be suspected. Valentine wondered at its beauty, its air of grandeur, its spaciousness, its straight broad ways, its order, its buildings. Why was London so lacking in just these qualities? They would give her the imperial air so essential for her destiny. And he was an architect. Could any profession offer more honour! Standing in the Place de la Concorde at the base of the pathetic Strasburg monument, touched by the sentiment of the moment, Valentine, the boy, dedicated his life to making London more worthy of being the home city of Empire.

He was a boy.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH VALENTINE GOES TO THE WRONG DOOR AND FINDS HIS FRIEND

THE morning brought a letter of welcome from Mr. Enthoven. He'd be delighted to see Valentine. Why not come up to lunch at twelve o'clock? He wanted news of London. "And I shall be very glad if I can be of any assistance to you while you are here. A first visit to Paris should be a joy. Let me share it. We'll spend the afternoon looking at things." Altogether a most friendly letter — and Valentine was the more glad to receive it in that his mood of yesterday had a little evaporated. He knew he could enjoy Paris — but how? It required keys.

Mr. Enthoven's concierge smiled recognition at the young Englishman. He was told to mount, and he ventured with a little trepidation on the very stuffy and very dark stairs which led past so many doors. He understood that he must go to the top of the house; but at the top were two portals and two electric bells. Well, it would n't matter much even if he did ring the wrong one.

He rang and waited. Nothing happened. He rang again. He could hear some movement. And then a young voice in song. The door opened. Great Scott! It was the girl who had taken his arm in the Rat Mort. Was she a friend of Mr. Enthoven's? But Valentine

had no time to think. French words, quite beyond his comprehension, streamed from her mouth, and before he knew what she was doing her hands had gone up to his face, had brought it down, and a happy kiss had been implanted on his lips. Poor boy. He had n't the slightest idea what to do. He turned red, and felt more than sheepish —

“Entrez, entrez, Monsieur —”

Now Valentine looked at her. How pretty she was, and how young . . . and how she was dressed. Just a white bathrobe, apparently, open at the neck — nothing else he thought. And she wanted him to go in, to visit her. It burst on him that she took this visit to be the result of their meeting of last night. He pulled himself together. He must explain. He must tell her that his ringing of the bell was all a mistake. But how to tell her? She was welcoming him. Oh, if he only had French!

“Monsieur Enthoven: est-il ici?” He repeated his one phrase.

The girl looked disappointed and then fell into a peal of laughter. Pulling her robe closer round her neck, but apparently quite untroubled by the fact that after all she was n't dressed, she stepped in her little pink bare feet out on to the dirty landing and across to the opposite door. Before Valentine could stop her, she had rung the bell and at once the door opened. A young man, very tall, very thin, very serious-looking, stood on the threshold. He did n't seem at all surprised; he did n't even smile. He had a palette in his hand and a brush in his mouth, which he removed to say, with a bow: “Mr. Barat, I presume. I am very glad to see you.

And you evidently went to the wrong door. That often happens. But you were in good hands. You would have found Madame there — Madame Angèle: Monsieur Valentine Barat — much more amusing company than you will find me. I hope you made friends." And then he broke off to apologise in French — or so Valentine thought — for the trouble his new friend had caused her, only to be interrupted by the lady's obvious disclaimers.

"She says she's very glad you made the mistake and she hopes you'll make it again."

Valentine would have given a deal to have been able to answer in kind and in French. That kiss was still on his lips ; he felt the girl's laughing eyes — and he looked up to see that his opportunity had gone.

"Angèle's a good sort." Mr. Enthoven was speaking again. "She likes Englishmen. But I'm jolly glad to see you. Come and sit down while I clear up, and then we'll go out and get some lunch and you shall tell me everything that's happening in London." He looked at Valentine with speculation in his eyes. Valentine felt that he knew what had happened.

They were in Mr. Enthoven's *atelier* now, and there was beginning for Valentine the week which of all the weeks of his young life was most to influence his future, his taste, his habits, his very self. He looked round the room. It was n't big, and it was n't particularly clean, and the walls were discoloured and marked. But it had some strange effect. It was n't for some time that Valentine realised that it owed much of its character

to its emptiness. A large window occupied the greater part of one side and overlapped into the sloping roof. A shelf held a glass vase with two pink carnations which stood out bravely against the grey distemper. There were no other decorations save a worthless, small, and most effective Buddha. At the most there were half a dozen books — "The Picture of Dorian Gray," "Marius the Epicurean," Whistler's "Gentle Art," "Là-bas," an album containing some designs by Forain, and Barbey d'Aurevilly's "Du Dandysme et de Georges Brummel." Against, and with their faces to, the wall were a dozen unframed canvases. There was also a table and on it were tubes of paint and a cracked blue dish heaped up with the reddest apples and a pomegranate. And of course an easel — but the canvas it bore had been hardly touched.

Valentine's host was cleaning his brushes. He seemed to do everything with method. Then he must go into his bedroom, which opened out of the studio, to remove his painting overall. He left the door open and Valentine saw the care with which he brushed his hair and rearranged his tie; and he could see that the room contained nothing but a camp bedstead, a wardrobe, a small table, and a row of boots and shoes, all neatly arranged on trees. The sun shone through the little room's window and spilled itself into the studio. And through the large window he could see the clear blue sky. "How one could work here," he said to himself. The place was so exact, so definite, so gay.

"I've only a tiny place or I'd offer to put you up," Enthoven turned and said. "It would n't be any good,

though, because I'm busy almost all the time till it's dark. Now come along. I'm hungry and I dare say you are too."

Just as the Rat Mort has changed so has the Abbaye de Thélème. Back in the nineties when Valentine knew it first, it too was a haunt of students, of models, of the happier cocottes of the quarter. Henry Harland wrote a story of it as it then was. One fed so well for a few francs; one sat, if one was wise, in that large room on the first floor and looked out on to the fountain plashing in the sun. Happiness seasoned the food, a new experience made the sauce. It was at the time of Valentine's first visit the restaurant of the Butte. But fashion is quick to move. A year or two later Valentine took friends to see it, friends who wanted to see the student at play, the model resting, the cocotte in her home. He bade them come early — otherwise a table might, he said, be un procurable. But they found an empty restaurant. Nobody arrived till close on eight o'clock — and then it was only one young couple, who alone hardly provided the right atmosphere, scarcely furnished the place. Valentine and his friends ate in depressed silence. The elderly lady of the party protested at the imposition. "So you pride yourself on knowing your Paris? This is about as gay as an Aerated Bread Shop," she said. Valentine felt his evening had failed to come off. . . . Suddenly however a little voice was heard. The young couple were forgetting that other people might talk French. "Kiss me now: nobody will see." And Valentine felt that he was justified — But this is a story out of place.

Enthoven was known at the Abbaye. Friends hailed him from most of the tables, but he and Valentine went to one by themselves and Valentine was examined and cross-examined about London and what was happening there in the world in which Enthoven took interest. He came poorly out of the ordeal. Painting had not appealed greatly to him. He knew almost nothing about it, although some names he had carried away from the weekly reading of the G. M. articles in the "Speaker," and he was able to tell Enthoven of the row which had been brewed in the "Spectator" as the result of the Degas café picture of Desboutin and the Monet haystack being exhibited at the International. Degas and Monet were only names to him, but nevertheless suddenly he found himself proclaiming and despising those evidences of English narrowness. And as he talked he listened, and as he listened he learned,—and later, back in Enthoven's studio, he learned more, he absorbed, found himself beginning to appreciate.

Enthoven was good to this youth who had come to him from England. They were of the same age almost to a day, but a decade of experience separated them. Valentine knew nothing. Basil Enthoven knew everything. And the older man told and taught the younger just as much as was good for him. He showed him just as much as he could fitly assimilate, took him to the Luxembourg and taught him in what Manet was great, and to the Casino de Paris and let him see by precept and example that after all this world in which himself was so well known was just for an hour and now and then. He made him feel that while a woman of that

world might be worth an evening's fancy she would n't
be worth the morning's reflection.

And so when at the end of a crowded week Valentine
went back to Westminster he was as he had started.
The only woman who had troubled his mind was
Enthoven's neighbour, and he had not seen her again.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH VALENTINE DOES N'T GO TO PARIS AND BEGINS TO WORK

BEFORE the vacation was at an end Valentine planned to visit Paris again. He could just manage to afford it he found. Many things pulled him there — memories, interests. He had learned to eat and to drink, to understand a little of what in the modern, the young view made a good picture. Other things he'd learned too. He wanted to see Enthoven once more and some of his friends, and to go into the French woods, to see French trees against the sky, and to drink French wine amongst the flowers. Enthoven had spoken a second time of putting him up in a corner of his little apartment. Why should n't he suggest going now? It was n't likely his father would object; he would hardly notice.

MY DEAR BASIL [he wrote], — Why should n't I spend a few more days in Paris before I go back to Oxford? You gave me such a wonderful time that I should like to. Perhaps you don't work at Easter. Let me come over and you shall as you suggested put me up for a night or two, and then we might go and spend two or three days at that place you told me of in the country — Barbizon, was n't it? Do try. Will you let

me know? I'd come next Wednesday if that'll suit you.
Yours ever,

VALENTINE BARAT.

P.S. And one day we might ask your neighbour, Madame Angèle, to come down and visit us in the Forest and some girl friend of hers.

I don't think he knew it, but that letter was written, the whole visit projected, not for the sake of Basil Enthoven, not to study more paintings, not for the French country or the Forest of Fontainebleau, but for Angèle's brown and candid eyes. But Valentine never saw her again, nor did he go again that year to Paris. Perhaps Basil Enthoven had wisdom beyond his years; perhaps he had had enough of this simple English lad. In any case his answer was not encouraging: —

Ah, dear Valentine, so you want to visit Paris again so soon, and to sport with Angèle Amaryllis in the shade? I must tell her; she'll be flattered. But she's not very free. Nor am I. Come if you like: I shall be glad to see you. I can't put you up, though. I'm much more busy than when you were here finishing my Salon picture against sending-in day. So I shan't enjoy much of your company. Let me know when you arrive. Yours fraternally,

BASIL ENTHOVEN.

A cold wind blew over Valentine's heart. He remained in London and went often to the play, and learned the

ways of the Café Royal. His friends thought him a little altered when he got back to Balliol.

But first and foremost Valentine Barat was English. Back in Oxford he was an undergraduate again and he threw himself with languid but effective energy into all his wonted interests. He thought of Paris and of what he'd seen and learned there. He contrasted its happy freedom with the cloistered masculine life he was now leading. And the new knowledge he'd acquired coloured his days, helped to dictate his reading, made in so many respects a man out of the boy. Also it brought him fresh extravagances. He had to have books and boot-trees and more clothes, to dine well,—or as well as Oxford can provide,—to drink clarets and burgundies just a little better than those that usually stayed his friends' appetites. And as often as he dared he would go to London to dine and to go to the play, to see his tailor and his hosier, to order wine. Before his fourth year was at an end, he was so deeply in debt that he ceased to keep any account of his difficulties. If all his debts had been with the cunning and long-suffering tradesmen of Oxford, they would have troubled him not at all, but his new habits had led to Bond Street and the Haymarket, and when he came down for good he came to a peck of worries, to a constant preoccupation about money. And his worries increased.

In part the fault was Mr. Barat's. Valentine's interest in architecture hadn't slumbered. He really cared for the art and profession by which his father lived. He had looked forward to entering his father's office,

and working. To begin with, he knew, he'd have to be satisfied with the merest drudgery, clerical work. But that would n't matter. It would n't last so very long. He was willing to work hard. He'd make himself useful. But somehow things did n't progress. Mr. Barat was like those mothers who won't allow even one single function of their house to be looked after by their daughters. He was, or seemed, jealous of allowing Valentine even to appear to be training on to take his place. He began by insisting on his son's taking a long holiday — months of travel in Italy, Spain, and on the farther shores of the Mediterranean, and then when he returned he was allowed to drift.

The son had, however, too much of his father's energy to suffer this inactivity without protest. They were at breakfast one morning.

"I wish, Valentine," his father said, looking up from his "Times," "that when you come home so late you'd be good enough to take your boots off in the hall. You've waked me up three nights running. I don't consider it any part of my business to quarrel with the hours you keep, but I do resent the loss of sleep. And I should think you must be suffering yourself a little."

"Very well, Sir." Valentine's conscience was n't so very clear: he had dined out and had been to see "The Powder Puff" and had then been to a ball of "The Powder Puff" company, dancing vigorously till five o'clock. And it was now half-past eight. Mr. Barat insisted with all the power that black looks give on extreme order in his house: breakfast was always at eight.

"I don't want you to think, Sir, that I've got no other interests than dancing, going to the theatre, and generally stopping up to all hours. But, indeed, I wanted, have wanted for a long time, to speak to you about that. Can't I begin my work now, Sir? It's kind of you to have given me so long a holiday, but I don't want to get slack. I want to be of use to you at the office as soon as I can."

Valentine could n't see whether his father was thinking or whether he was still reading the paper. He held it before him. He was as a matter of fact thinking — thinking what a nuisance this problem was that so far he'd evaded, but which now apparently he must settle.

He lowered the paper and looked at his son unsympathetically. "Yes, perhaps you ought to begin to work. I knew a good deal more at your age than you do. You can come round to the office with me to-morrow and we'll see what can be found for you. But" — and he smiled without charm, grimly — "I shan't expect much of you for the present."

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH VALENTINE FINDS THAT AFTER ALL IT IS EASIER TO PLAY THAN TO WORK

A COUPLE of years passed. Mr. Barat was no better, no worse than his word. He had n't expected much of his son, and he had n't enabled his son to do more than was expected of him. With the day on which at nine o'clock precisely Valentine entered the George Street office he found he was making the acquaintance of an entirely new man in his father—a man of iron apparently, and a man who would do everything himself that he could do, even though the work suffered in consequence, a man who was jealous of his every prerogative, who trusted neither his pupils nor his clerks. Nor would he trust his son. Valentine was given a room and a desk and all the usual appurtenances of an architect; he was told to study; he was given a job now and then to tinker with; the head clerk was instructed to look after him — but he was provided with no serious work; he was n't taken seriously; he neither knew his father's clients nor his father's plans.

Every morning at seven minutes to nine father and son would leave Great College Street and would walk through Dean's Yard, not speaking as they walked. Work never ceased in Mr. Barat's head, but he would never talk of it till he reached his desk nor would he have it spoken of after six o'clock at night, when he left

for home. Punctual he was — to the minute, and he insisted on punctuality from his son.

Valentine soon found, however, that if he arrived on time he could do within limits whatever he pleased. If he were ready to start from home when his father started, very little attention was paid to what he did during the rest of the day. The chief thing he had to do was to put in an appearance at the right moment. The rest might be left to his conscience: it certainly was subjected to no strict supervision. At first, and indeed for some time, he tried to carry out his little ambitions, to work, to get past the barrier that separated what he could learn out of books from the actual practice of his profession. But his fellows in the office did n't go out of their way to help him and, indeed, made evident by their attitude that they thought him a fool for his attempts to make a place for himself, and he gradually began to drift with the tide. He would arrive at nine and read the paper and then perhaps do some little job; later he would write his own letters, and go early to his lunch, picking up some Oxford contemporary at the Home or Foreign Office. Sometimes he did n't go back to Bellew and Barat's at all. What was the good? He knew, could n't help knowing, that this piece of work or that was toward, but there his knowledge ceased. The head clerk did n't help him much. Mr. Barat told even his chief assistants as little as was possible. Once or twice at the beginning Valentine would ask his father if he would n't explain his intentions with regard to some building or contract that seemed to promise special interest.

"There's that job in Oxford Street, Sir," he began one

day; "what are we going to do about that? I wish you'd let me see how you decide on your plans and how you arrange your frontage and so on. I feel if you'd only let me go right through one job with you from beginning to end I'd learn a great deal and I'd begin to be of use to you."

His father looked at him. "I have so often explained in the office, Valentine, that I object to that word 'job' that I should have thought that even you would avoid using it. Architects are not engaged by the 'job.' But, apart from that, I have something else to do than to go through all the complications of Mr. Butler's building with you. It would, as far as I can see, be quite fruitless. What do you know about his requirements? Do you even know what the building's wanted for?"

"Yes, Sir, I do: it's to be a bookseller's below and flats above. And I meant to have included hearing exactly what Mr. Butler wanted in my questions."

"Well, then you have more curiosity than I gave you credit for if you've actually learnt that it is to be a bookseller's shop. Anyhow I have n't the time to teach you what you want. You must learn some other way."

Valentine plucked up courage.

"Perhaps, Sir, — and I've thought of it often, — it would be best if I started to learn in some other office. Could n't you get me a place in Bealby and Wright's? I do so want to get to understand it all, and somehow, although I've been here for months, I don't get on."

"Yes, I've noticed that. Has it occurred to you that it may be your own fault? And has it occurred to you that you won't get 'to understand it all' — whatever you may mean by 'it' — or to understand anything else

properly, unless you put your shoulder to the wheel? If you spend your nights dancing and most of your day writing letters and gossiping in cafés with your friends," — Mr. Barat evidently saw more than his son gave him credit for, — "you'll never know much more than you do now. Your working under Mr. Bealby would n't alter all that, I'm afraid."

"But I *will* know more, Sir. By and by you'll want to work less hard — not yet, of course, but some day, long hence, I hope — and then you'd find me ready, if only I could get properly started."

"Yes — 'if.' But in any case I do not think it necessary for you to begin counting up the future. I am capable now, and I shall remain capable of my work until I want to lay it down. Then we shall see. And in the mean time if, instead of keeping me talking, you'd go back to your own room and to your study of the 'Sportsman' we should get on a little better."

Valentine left the room more than crestfallen. The "Sportsman" was another thing his father had noticed, then. Mr. Barat seemed to look at nothing and to see everything. Valentine read the paper, it was true — but he'd far rather work. In fact, he'd far rather work than do half the things on which he now wasted his time. And it was a shame that his father should taunt him a second time with his dancing. There and then he swore to himself that never again as long as he lived would he go to a dance; and forthwith he sat down and wrote excusing himself, on various pretexts, none of them very plausible, from keeping a dozen engagements of the sort he had already made.

This brief talk between father and son had, as far as Valentine was concerned, cut down to the bone. Not often had Mr. Barat been so brutal — yes, brutal was the word. He seemed to see neither that he was giving his son no proper chance nor that after all, within the limits that encompassed him, Valentine was learning a good deal. His father refused, in effect, to help him. I think tears came into Valentine's eyes. It was all so hopeless. He had done his best. He swore he had. And here was his father not seeing, not knowing, and yet seeing so much, seeing all that was worst and none of what was best. It would n't be any use now to make him understand that even if he did dance at night — had danced, that even if he did read the "Sportsman" and amuse his hours with his friends, he'd first done all the work that was set him, did really put his back into all the book-learning side of the profession that he wanted to make his own. He looked round his room. There was hardly anything in it to show that he was a working architect, so little that was practical came his way. The head clerk would n't give him small bits of routine work; he had too much respect for the hereditary principle. And yet Valentine was willing to back himself against any man of his age for a knowledge of just that side of his art that he could work at at his own desk. Well, it was no use worrying any more just now. Some day perhaps he'd be a partner. Lots of things might happen. He supposed he'd get his chance.

Valentine turned to the fire, poked it viciously, and picked up the offending "Sportsman."

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH THE GREAT PROJECT UNFOLDS ITSELF

SOMETHING unusual, something more important than usual, was evidently occupying both Mr. Barat's time and mind. His habits were being violently deflected from their norm. He saw more people; his post increased; and instead of coming home night after night with the regularity of an alarm-clock set for six o'clock, he often went elsewhere from the office, and even sometimes dressed and went elsewhere to dinner. And, most wonderful of all, instead of lunching frugally in his own room on an oatmeal cake and a glass of milk, as had been his invariable wont, he would depart often to lunch in the City, or, as Valentine learned by accident through being there himself, at the Savoy. On that occasion his host was very obviously not of the kind that Mr. Barat usually cultivated. He was a big man, with a benevolent, unintellectual, and yet predatory face.

"Who is that gentleman over there with his back to the wall — in the corner by the window?" Valentine took an opportunity of asking a *maitre d'hôtel*.

"That's Sir Edward Drakelow, Mr. Barat," he was answered. "He lunches here often; I wonder you've not seen him. And the gentleman with him comes often, too, lately, but I don't know who he is."

The information interested Valentine. What could

his father be doing in that galley? Every one knew all about Sir Edward Drakelow. He was controlling owner of the Phoenix Line of cargo and passenger steamers, and made a table necessity in huge quantities; he ran race-horses, of which he knew a great deal less than Valentine did himself; he was supposed to be due for a peerage; he was in a score of big things; also he was a self-made man whose friends were not enthusiastic and whose enemies had many things stored up against him. "An odd man for the guv'nor to lunch with," Valentine said to himself, and turned to his companion, who was a great deal prettier and more amusing than, if not perhaps quite so interesting as, Sir Edward.

That night, as father and son were taking their solitary dinner, and when the port — a very good vintage port; Mr. Barat had many of the old-fashioned virtues — had been put on the table and the servant had left them alone, Valentine found that his presence at the Savoy had not, as he had mildly hoped, gone unperceived.

"You were lunching to-day at the Savoy, Valentine. I've said before that I don't think it any part of my duty to interfere with how you spend your leisure, but — well, I hope you can afford it. Still, that is n't what I was going to say. I wanted to tell you that we are going at the office to be very busy for some time to come."

There was a note of elation in Mr. Barat's voice so unusual that Valentine wondered what it could be that could lure his father out of his usual reticence.

"It will not, however, make any difference to you — but I did n't want you to see the first announcement of what we are to be busy on in the papers. You have not known it, but I have for some months been working at a scheme for the proper and dignified and yet profitable utilisation of that big bit of open land in Leicester Square that the County Council has had on its hands for so long. The essence of the scheme I have had in my mind for many years, but only recently, with these big improvements about Shaftesbury Avenue, has it had any proper opportunity to develop into something practical. Now to-day the matter has been settled finally. I am not anxious to appear very prominently in it myself, but as it was my own idea and as I have had to work out most of the details and to combine the various interests, I am — or perhaps I should say the firm is — bound to get a good deal of publicity."

Valentine waited anxiously to hear more, but Mr. Barat apparently had said all he had to say. There was a pause, and then, having heard his son express an awkward and gratified interest, he rose and went to drink his after-dinner cup of China tea in that small but elaborate drawing-room in which nothing had been altered since Mrs. Barat died.

It was not on the next day, but on its successor, that Valentine found any announcement of his father's scheme in the papers. And then as he read he whistled. Certainly Mr. Barat had a good press. The "Mail" gave pride of place to a project which Valentine could see was far greater than Mr. Barat's few and meagre words

had led him to suppose. It was not an affair of architecture only: it was to be the realisation of a dream, a matter of millions of pounds, a building which would mark in no mere rhetorical sense an epoch in British civic architecture. New York was to be outdone in everything but height. Mr. Barat had spoken of it as his "own idea." So that stern face could screen such fancies; that harsh brain could evolve plans transcending the happiest and even the most extravagant conceptions of the idealists who pray so ceaselessly that London may be relieved of its meanness, be given buildings worthy of her great destiny.

Briefly and grossly, Mr. Barat's scheme was to provide London with the greatest building in the world. But it was also to be one of the most important, and it was certainly to be the most comprehensive, the most all-embracing. On that fine site, the plot of ground which is bounded on the south by Leicester Square, on the north by Shaftesbury Avenue, and on the west by Wardour Street, the architect-visionary — for, so Valentine as he read began to think of his father — had decreed a lordly pleasure-house, a home for all our colonies, a market-place, a great clubhouse — oh! it was to contain everything! No plans were given, no drawings, but that bright journalist who had the writing-up of the project had the gift of words. He made the scheme glow. One saw already minarets, domes, towers, arches; one saw vast doors swing open and the coming and going of crowds. The building was a success before even a stone was laid.

"I do not think I can tell you more than you have read in the papers, Valentine. The matter has been settled finally, as I told you, and much has been done, but more has to be done, much more, and nothing is to be gained by talking just now. So we won't talk about it."

Thus Mr. Barat answered Valentine when on the way to work in the morning of the announcement his son dared to speak of what was for the time at least on everybody's mind.

Later, when he had gone through his morning's ritual, had read his papers, been shaved, answered his letters, Valentine walked across the park to look again in this new aspect at the site which was to bear his father's monument. Already it was a public attraction. He found in Leicester Square and Shaftesbury Avenue little groups of curious people bent on seeing what was to be seen of the morning's sensation. And there was little enough to see — just the ordinary mean London hoardings surrounding waste ground in which even now the spring flowers were blossoming, with here and there a row of soiled houses not quite due for demolition.

Valentine walked to the bottom of the square and looked across at the place where surely his father would choose to put the front of his group. And to think that he, that father's son, could n't know, for a time at least, not until it was a commonplace of the office, more about the plans than any man in the crowds around him. His imagination had been fired by what he had read, by the vast, the grandiose possibilities of what had been projected, and all the architect in him leaped at the thought

of the chances such work would give, of the possibilities of building on such a scale . . . and he might be a clerk in some one else's employment for all the immediate good it was likely to do him!

There was no war, there was no great scandal, no other entralling interest in the time at which it chanced that Mr. Barat's "Great Project"—as it came to be called—was first given to the world. So for days the papers were full of it. No one knew what it was to look like, but every one made his guess. Rewards were offered by enterprising papers for drawings which should ultimately prove to be most like the destined building. Austere though Mr. Barat was, he seemed to have the successful business man's capacity for keeping the world on the tiptoe of expectation. If, as Valentine was sure, he acted so to speak as his own press-agent, he had almost missed his vocation. Perhaps it was his very austerity, his single-mindedness, that so successfully imposed itself and his will on his colleagues and on all the hundred seekers after information.

Colleagues? Yes, indeed: Mr. Barat had colleagues. Formally at least; officially, he made little direct appearance. The architects of the project were always Bellew and Barat. The chairman of the company which was to finance and carry through the undertaking was the Marquess of Buttery, a noble figurehead. Equally distinguished noblemen, equally distinguished ex-public servants, were his fellows on the board, but Valentine was sure that, apart from his father, the brains of the whole business were in the head of Sir Edward Drakelow

— and that fact was the only fly in the ointment of his satisfaction. Valentine did n't like this Drakelow. He did n't like the look of him, nor the way he managed his horses, nor the way in which he was spoken of in that light world which Valentine mostly affected, and in which, light though it is, the inhabitants have the habit, oddly enough, of appraising reputations at their true value. He shrugged his shoulders. At least Drakelow was efficient — and his father was efficient, too.

The more the world knew of the "Great Project," the more it expressed delight and astonishment. Details were kept back. As I have said, no authorised drawing appeared, — nor did Valentine see one, — but gradually it became known how this difficulty and that were to be surmounted. Such thoroughfares as cut the site were to be retained either in their present exact positions or in positions more convenient. And yet the building that was to cover it all was in effect to be one, part joined to part by flying arches, even by tunnels. And the fact that Lisle Street and Gerrard Street, for instance, cut through the building was to be turned to advantage. It would help to separate the more different sides of the enterprise. For there was to be a great theatre and a great church, a concert hall finer than any in London, an hotel and restaurant in which the coöperation of Mr. Harry Higgins and the Ritz-Carlton group had already been secured, a synagogue, a music-hall, a gymnasium, a swimming-bath, a great market-place for the exhibition and sale of the produce of all the Dominions, great offices for the representatives of those Dominions, an over-seas club with imperial aims.

Imperial — that was the word; that was the note of the whole thing, and yet as one used it one remembered the theatre and the music-hall, the suites of offices open to any tenant who cared to pay the rent and use them for reputable purposes, and then here and there, wherever they could be placed conveniently, so to speak, flats, flats large and small, palatial or simple, for the millionaire and the working-woman, with kitchens, or served from common kitchens. Englishmen had a peculiar satisfaction in knowing that it was to be several times larger than any building in the world; that even if it were not so high as the boasted edifices of New York, it would cover several times the space and that it would have many more uses. Why, the hotel alone would dwarf the Waldorf-Astoria.

And then it was whispered that perhaps after all it would be as high, if not higher, than the last word in American sky-scrappers. One thing became certain: over it all was to be a tower, a lighthouse of the Empire, dominating London.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH MR. BARAT IS SHOWN TO BE WORKING HARDER THAN EVER. VALENTINE TO BE GETTING INTO MISCHIEF

AND now most of Mr. Barat's habits went by the board. Instead of rising at seven and doing everything on a schedule, breakfasting, starting out, opening his desk, attending to his correspondence, and so on, and then, later, going home and dismissing all outward reference to his work until morning came again, he seemed to be consumed by an energy which allowed no leisure, brooked the interference of no stated hours. Valentine would wake in the morning and would learn that his father had been at work since sunrise or that he had had an early cup of tea and had already gone out. An unused garret of the little house was at this period turned into a studio. Mr. Barat kept the key. No one entered it save himself and an old retainer, one Fergusson, a Scot, whose career as a builder's foreman had been cut short by an accident which had crippled one leg. It had been a nasty accident and Mr. Barat, it was said, had saved the man's life at some great risk to his own. But be that as it might the man worshipped the very ground his master trod, was jealous of his every movement. In return, he was the one man Mr. Barat seemed to trust, with whose constant presence he could put up. Fergusson

could come and go either in the office or in Great College Street just as he willed. He would call morning after morning for his master's bag. He was in great sense guardian of his master's drawings. He was a faithful dog. And with all these reputable qualities he had some learning, a Scot's learning, and he knew his job. For an architect he could be invaluable. And so, Valentine thought, Mr. Barat found him. He knew at least that the old man helped with much of the ruder work which ordinarily should have been done by more regular assistants, that he was clever in calculation, that he had even learned the chief theories of his master's art. As the great project began to crystallise on paper, and as Valentine knew, without seeing them (for no one saw them), many of the drawings to be approaching completion, he came to think of the Scot peculiarly as his father's body-servant and the guardian of his secrets. Fergusson came to carry always a locked brown leather despatch box in which the Leicester Square papers were neatly kept. Never was he far from his master, whose very shadow he was. And with it all he was a pleasant, genial old chap, hardly taciturn save where his master's affairs were in question.

Gradually Bellew and Barat dropped other work. Some came and had to be attended to, but Mr. Barat made it clear to Wilson, his head clerk, that new clients were to be refused and fresh commissions from old ones discouraged. "We'll give younger men a chance, Wilson; we've got our hands quite full enough."

"*He has, I dare say,*" Wilson came and grumbled to Valentine, "but the rest of us might stop at home for

all the good we are. Why does n't he give the younger men a chance? I'm too old for a chance myself, and besides doing nothing suits me, especially when I'm well paid for it. But there's you, Mr. Valentine. You're always complaining you've no real work to do. You could make yourself on this job if your father'd let you."

"I know; but get out, Wilson, all the same: I'm sick of the subject."

"And so am I, Mr. Valentine — more than sick. That old devil, Fergusson, is the only man who'll ever get any 'chances'; he's the only man your father trusts." And Wilson disappeared, mumbling in his beard.

Valentine at this time had quite enough preoccupations of his own. His own affairs were going from bad to worse. His father allowed him a hundred and fifty a year, and he was paid an additional hundred and fifty for his "work" at the office. Three hundred a year. A fair income for any unencumbered young man of twenty-five who lived at home and had no expenses for bed and board. But Valentine had handicaps of his own making. In the first place, he had come down from Oxford burdened by miscellaneous debts, and in the second, the habits he had sown there were providing a plentiful crop in this their third year. His extravagances were many of them peculiar to himself, but they were none the less ridiculous, none the less disproportionate to his income. It is true that the little ostentations that had marked the boy were cleared away now. Rather his affectations were in the other direction. He proclaimed that he'd as lief ride third as first, and as for

the omnibuses which he had vexed his mother by ignoring, he said he'd prefer them to taxis if only they would take him where he wanted to go. And to do him justice, he rode third more often than first, and if his method of covering the ground in London was preferably at a fast pace on foot, yet he did honestly feel he could n't afford a taxi more often than was absolutely necessary.

The trouble was, though, that where he saved a shilling he would spend a pound. He would take at Westminster Abbey a City motorbus, pay a penny and get off at the Savoy to await his guest in the Grill Room hall. And as he considered himself rather a dab at reading a menu, usually his bill was not light. The young woman from the Gaiety likes to eat early plover's eggs at the earliest possible minute. And he had revived his affection for Paris: he would "run over" once or twice a month — always with a plausible pretext. His friends knew him as a good guide to pleasure: they helped to provide excuses for this easy travel; and of course there were always picture shows to see in the French capital and some theatrical sensation he did n't want to miss. The Russian ballet too: Valentine was one of its earliest and remained one of its most regular devotees. In the result he was in the deuce of a hole, and almost the only thing to be said for him was that he had n't had recourse to money-lenders. He did keep, though, some of the specious letters that reached him. They might be useful some day as a last resort. One ran:—

Sir:— Our Clients in Town and Country have so thoroughly appreciated our removal to more conven-

iently situated West End premises that we have perforce to express our sincerest thanks for the "nice things" that have been said and written in approbation of the step we have taken . . .

— and so on. With it came a neat booklet entitled "Golden Opinions" and printed in gold—as if to indicate how much of the precious metal Messrs. So-and-So had to spare. Valentine was n't taken in: he thought it amusing, characteristic. But still . . .

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH VALENTINE IS INTRODUCED TO THE SPORT OF KINGS

EARLIER than this, a year or more earlier, almost by accident, Valentine had fallen on a new way of getting rid of his money. He had spent a week-end at Chislehurst with his mother's brother, a prosperous insurance agent — young Colin's father as a matter of fact. On the Monday morning they had come up together — Valentine very slim, rather elegant in his quiet way, his uncle in his befrogged fur coat and silk hat, rather red about the gills but with something of a fine air all the same. He owed it to his Vandyke moustache. They did n't have their first-class carriage to themselves. A little fat man was already ensconced in a corner with a very large cigar and a copy of the "Sportsman" — the father, that paper, of all the other "Sportsmen" that Valentine grew to read.

"Well, Mr. Barton, are you picking 'em?" Mr. Wilder — the uncle — asked.

"Oh, I'm picking 'em all right all right, but I don't pick enough of 'em, and when I do back anything I have the devil's own luck."

Mr. Wilder screwed his mouth up humorously. "Leave that to your readers, Mr. Barton, eh? Wiser, is n't it?"

"Yes, I guess it is."

"But can't you put me on to a good thing? Have n't you a 'double' for the Lincolnshire and National?"

Valentine was reading what Mr. Walkley had to say about Saturday night's Pinero *première*, and had paid little attention to the conversation's start, but at the mention of Lincolnshire and National he began to take notice and even to recall what had gone before.

What an extraordinary thing! His uncle, that very respectable man of affairs, Colin's father, his aunt's husband, a pillar of the church, discussing the Spring Handicaps with interest and apparently with knowledge. Wonders would never cease. Valentine did n't know, poor dear, that it is an insurance agent's duty to be all things to all men, to carry always the bag of the commercial traveller, to be able to talk about every man's business.

All the same it was clear that Mr. Wilder really found pleasure in talking about the turf. He pursued the subject.

"Don't you think that Lelia has a chance?"

"No, I don't: anyhow, I don't believe in mares to gamble on at this time of the year, and no price would tempt me to touch a three-year-old for the Lincoln. Sceptre could n't win. Why should Lelia? The field's as good."

Mr. Wilder had no answer. His friend continued:—

"But I do know they're backing Porthos. Now that's an 'orse. I don't say he'll win, but I think he's pretty well in. The going's good down Lambourne way even after all the frost we've had, and that's half the battle. At Newmarket the ground's like iron."

"Then Porthos is the first half of your 'double.' What's the other? What'll win the National?"

"Oh, there you have me. I agree with Fred Swindell: I don't like to see my money flying i' the air. Ask yourself what'll get round, and you'll be near it. But if you want my tip — well, try Merchandise. And you'd get a thousand to three about the 'double' if you jumped in quick."

"I think I will," Mr. Wilder answered, and relapsed into the "Financial News."

The sporting gentleman left the train at Cannon Street, and Mr. Wilder, moved perhaps by conscience, turned to his nephew:

"Rather common, that man. I have to be polite to him though. Useful in the business."

Valentine was curious. "What is he?"

"Oh, he owns and edits a sporting paper — the 'Stable Secret,' I think it's called. But don't you pay any attention to what we were saying. I don't know anything about racing. It's a mug's game."

Came Charing Cross and they separated. But Valentine pondered what he had heard and what his uncle had just said. If Mr. Wilder did n't know anything about racing, what made him so anxious to get a tip? And how was it he knew anything at all about Lelia?

There was something a little furtive about it, Valentine thought.

Next day Valentine asked at the newsagent's for the "Stable Secret," and found that it was a shilling

weekly sold in a sealed envelope in order to prevent, he supposed, the too easy repetition of its mysteries. To Valentine its contents were largely Greek. All the races of the week were set out in tabular form and the likely winners were indicated. The Lincolnshire Handicap and Grand National — two races which were not to be run till the coming month — were the subjects of special articles and the chances of all the principal competitors were discussed. Sure enough the writer — "The Sandown Major" was his pen-name; and Valentine smiled when he recalled the squat little figure of Mr. Barton — favoured Porthos and Merchandise. There were plenty of "ifs" about his advocacy, and other horses were to be "saved on," but still he wrote with so much restraint and with so much apparent wisdom that he convinced Valentine that if the two horses did n't win it would be through the interposition of some malignant Fate; and then and there he determined to back them, to get that "thousand to three about the double" which had been suggested to Mr. Wilder.

But how? He could n't ask his uncle, and although he knew men who at least claimed to make money by backing horses he had a hesitation about telling them of this new interest of his. They talked about horses, too, in the office, but for obvious reasons he could n't look for information there. If he did n't know what to do it was his own fault, of course. Until the previous day he had turned a deaf ear to all conversations, at Oxford or elsewhere, in which the race-horse had figured. They just had n't interested him. It had all seemed so futile. Moreover, taking it by and large, as far as he

could judge men lost more money than they ever won. But he had only been waiting the psychological moment apparently. This time the thing had come to him in a different guise, backed with greater weight. After all, his uncle was n't a fool, and his very anxiety, so ill dissembled, that his nephew should n't take what he had heard seriously, convinced him that it was worth remembering. Also of course fat little Mr. Barton had authority. Valentine was young enough to be influenced by an editor's importance. It was true that any one who had a shilling could learn that Porthos and Merchandise were likely to win their races, but then it was clear that Mr. Barton had special hopes for these two horses, or he would n't have gone to the length of suggesting their support to his friend.

Valentine felt that the thousand pounds was as good as in his pocket — but, still, how was he to find a bookmaker?

For the young and sanguine of spirit difficulties crop up only to be ignored or overcome. Having read the "Stable Secret" and having contracted an interest in the doings of Porthos and Merchandise, Valentine read day by day with the most unnatural assiduity all that the racing critics had to say about the handicaps with which the racing season was to open. "Uno," "Marcion," "Captain Coe" were the law and the prophets to him, the "Sportsman," the "Sporting Life," and the "Sporting Chronicle" his constant companions. He read, and did n't at all understand, the training reports. That Porthos had "covered about seven furlongs at a sweating pace" and that Merchandise "strode along" were

no doubt interesting facts when you knew how to take them, but in the mean time they were neither convincing nor exciting. No one had the opportunity of explaining to this novice the rudiments of this great new game, and so although he became more and more absorbed in it, came to give a good deal of every day to its study, he did n't then or at any future time learn more about horse-racing than that horses raced. He never knew what the weight-for-age scale was, for instance; he could no more judge for himself whether a horse was "well in" a handicap than he could read Tamil and Telegu. In fact, of everything that made the race-horse other than a mere gambling machine he was comprehensively ignorant. But he always read what the experts had to say and, although he skipped the tiresome technical parts of their screeds, he got gradually to know something of the ages, the likely capacities, and the performances of most of the horses in training. His was a prehensile mind.

I am, however, anticipating. Valentine found his bookmaker easily enough now that his attention had at length been attracted to this new and easy way of making money. In the discreet pages of one of the sporting dailies he found a dozen unpretentious advertisements — a mere list of names and addresses. He would choose out one and then the matter would be as simple as could be. But no instructions were given. Should he call? Or would it be better to write? A desire to see the man who was to have the honour of paying him a thousand pounds for nothing made him decide on the first alternative; and, besides, he'd perhaps find out something

of how the thing was worked, learn the ropes so to speak.

The next morning, having made his selection from the list of advertising bookmakers, and having called first at his hatter's to have his hat ironed so as to make a good impression, Valentine started out for King Street, St. James's, where at No. 15A he found on the ground floor a simple door inscribed with the name of Mr. Harry Wiseman. He rang an electric bell, but before the door could be opened the lift-boy, who was hanging about in the hall, told him to walk straight in, that the "gents" were inside. The instruction, and indeed the fact that his arrival had been seen by any one at all, made him squirm. It made him feel too much like an ordinary victim of the gambling fever. "Will you walk into my parlour?" and so on. No doubt it was about that that the lift-boy was thinking. However, it was n't any use to turn tail now.

Like the advertisement that had brought him, the interior was unpretentious. It was also both business-like and domestic. Two very capable-looking gentlemen, one old and grey and the other young and dapper, both Jews of the less ornate and more intelligent class, were seated opposite one another snatching what was evidently their midday meal fetched from some near-by restaurant before the pace of the day's work made eating impossible. Valentine, however, had little time for observation.

"Well, Sir, what can we do for you?" the younger man asked, eyeing his visitor appraisingly as if to judge the probable value of his bank balance.

sation was at an end. "Very well," he said; "I'll come back on Thursday."

And on Thursday Mr. Wiseman told him they were willing to do business with him, that he should have a credit of twenty-five pounds' and that they would book him "a bet of a thousand to five the double, Porthos and Merchandise" if he liked.

Valentine did like, and the opening of the account was sealed with a whiskey-and-soda and a remarkably good cigar. And while he drank and smoked he watched with interest the way things went in this curious new world into which he had walked. It was afternoon; the luncheon-tray had presumably been carried back to the public-house; there was an air of serious if unconventional business. Valentine noticed a safe and several ledgers; telegraph messengers would arrive on one another's heels, each carrying a sheaf of telegrams; the telephone rang continually—"What's that? You want a pony on Diadem for the 3.5 race. You're on. Good-bye."

"But," Valentine objected as he saw this bet written down, "what's to prevent that man, whoever he was, repudiating the bet and saying that he never made it or that he said some other horse? I'd have thought you'd insist on having everything in writing."

The younger man laughed. "No time. Besides, we know who we bet with. Once a man's got credit with us he can telephone or telegraph or come here and give us his commissions. It's all done that way. We hardly ever have a dispute, and when we do we generally settle it easily."

"But there was that bet for Diadem. If the odds

are ten to one against it and it wins, you'll lose a lot — two hundred and fifty pounds."

"More than that by a long chalk — look here: we've one hundred and eighty pounds for Diadem already. I don't mind betting that there'll be a good deal more in this lot of wires" — and he held out his hands to a newly arrived messenger. "Yes, here you are! 'Diadem two pounds'; 'Diadem ten pounds'; and here's 'Diadem one hundred pounds.' The race is in ten minutes: this man is running it pretty close," and he handed Valentine the telegram: "Can I have a hundred Diadem reply Biggar." It had been despatched at Cork a couple of hours earlier.

"Here, Guy'nor, shall we take another hundred Diadem? There's just time to answer."

"How much have we got already? Let's look. One ninety-two. And there is n't a hundred for all the other horses in the race. Um, um. Well, say 'yes.'"

The younger man — Cardew his name was — wrote out a telegram quickly. "You are on Wiseman," it read. "Now skip," he said to the boy, and turning to Valentine he added: "That wire has to be timed before the race starts to make the thing regular. But it'll just get through."

Valentine smiled nervously: "I'd like a couple of pounds Diadem myself," he said. He thought he might as well have the excitement. It was the first bet he'd ever made.

"Right-o! and you can stop and see what happens if you like. Take another drink and sit down and read the paper."

Valentine refused the drink but sat down; he'd already read all the papers Mr. Wiseman's office afforded. He waited with some anxiety. He didn't want to lose two pounds. . . .

"Diadem wins," an office boy who stood by the tape machine which ticked away in an inner room announced after a while.

"So you've begun well," Cardew said, throwing a smile in Valentine's direction and outwardly in no wise disturbed by his own considerable loss; it was all in the day's work apparently.

"Yes, but you've lost — a lot, I'm afraid," Valentine replied sympathetically.

"I guess it won't break us."

"But how much have you lost?"

"It depends on the price. It'll be up directly." The tape machine ticked again. "Here it is: 'Diadem: seven to four.'"

"What does that mean, as far as I am concerned?" Valentine asked.

"It means that you've won — what did you have on? Oh, I know: two pounds — it means that you've won three pounds ten shillings, less our commission, and that you'll get a cheque next Monday — if, of course, you don't lose it in the meantime."

"But there's the other bet I had — the double. Don't you reckon that?"

"Not yet; that'll be charged to your account if you lose in the week they run those races; it won't affect your account in the mean time. Want anything else to-day, though?"

"No, thanks. I've had beginner's luck; I'll clear out now." And Valentine gathered up his hat and stick and departed, bitten but not so bitten but that he kept free of this new game for the rest of the week. At least he had started with an actual win. He spent the sixty-six and sixpence in a dinner at the Café Royal, and, as it happened, he did n't go near Mr. Wiseman for nearly a month, not, indeed, until, having remained an assiduous reader of the sporting papers, he discovered that Porthos had gone amiss and been scratched. Not that it would have made any difference to his double: Merchandise fell at the first fence.

But this reverse came too late. Diadem's win had started Valentine in a habit of mind from which he was not soon to free himself. It had been so easy. True, he had since lost five pounds, but . . . well, he was wiser now; he knew more about the game: "doubles" were ridiculous anyway. How could he hope to win? No more "doubles" for him.

Thereafter Valentine betted and betted. He began and for some time continued in what Admiral Rous called "the five-pound line of business," but gradually he increased his stakes. On the whole, he held his own. On some Mondays he'd be hard put to it to pay his losses on the previous week's racing. Long ago his credit had been increased to a hundred pounds. Occasionally he won really considerable sums. Hours were occupied every day in the study of the day's programme, the writing of telegrams, telephoning, the sending of messengers. His whole attitude towards life was altered.

If he had a good win he would almost fling his money about, would entertain, would buy books, pictures, more clothes, go unexpectedly to Paris; and if he lost it was too late to reduce his scale of expenditure.

Things were thus at the time that Mr. Barat's Great Project was launched.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH VALENTINE ACTS THE PART OF HOST FOR
ANOTHER AND STRANGE BEASTS ARE EATEN

AND at this time Valentine fell in love. To say that is to say no more than that a state of things existed which had existed on and off ever since he first came down from Oxford. But this time it was with a difference. This time, he told himself, it was really serious. Up to the present his habits and his habit of mind had rather kept him out of drawing-rooms and from the places where damsels of his own station and class were likely to be very much in evidence. True, he used to go to dances, but he had gone to dance, not to chatter; he looked rather for a good partner than a pretty girl; his affections did not become engaged. And then always his mood took him rather to a theatrical dance than to a ball in Lowndes Square. More freedom; less responsibility. So when he had thought himself in love it had been always with some one who would n't have seriously considered marrying him for a moment — even if he had offered himself. And he was n't fool enough to do that. The young ladies of the world in which mostly he had his being were looking for more important game. They liked him, liked him very much, but they had their emotions under control. Valentine Barat was all very well to lunch and dine and sup with now and then . . .

but they knew, and he knew, that it was in the spirit of easy friendship. He was a distraction, and, as long as he remained young and clean and did n't misunderstand and paid the small and large expenses of the day in a becoming manner, he was at liberty to remain so.

All this was to be changed.

Valentine, on one of the days that followed hard on the first announcement of Mr. Barat's enterprise, was called from his morning's study of the day's racing programme to his desk telephone: —

"Is that you, Barat? Look here, I want you like a good chap to do something for me. You're not engaged for lunch, are you? — even if you are you must get free! You're not — that's good."

Valentine knew who was talking. It was an arbitrary friend of his at the Foreign Office, an Oxford contemporary and an amusing fellow who liked to bend every one to his own unimportant will. Martin Fahey — that was his name — continued: —

"I've asked two ladies to lunch with me at the Carlton: you've got to make the fourth."

"That's easy," Valentine answered. "Who are they? Do I know them?"

"No, you don't. At least I don't think you do. It is n't so easy, though. I can't alter the hour — and I may be late, am sure to be late in fact. I've got a job here that may keep me I don't know how long. You've got to go to the Palm Court and identify them and tell them I could n't get them on the telephone — I can't: they've gone out for the morning, seeing dressmakers or something — and that I shall be late. Say that it's

a real affair of state, Peace of Europe Trembling in the Balance and all that sort of thing: lay it on thick. Anyhow, no one is to wait. I've ordered a table. I'll come as soon as I can."

"Hold hard a moment. What are their names?"

"Fenelon — Mrs. Fenelon and her daughter. That's all right, then. Good-b—"

"Stop! How the deuce am I to know them? They won't be the only women in the Palm Court at one o'clock."

"Oh, that's easy — although I might have remembered to tell you. You look for a really beautiful girl whom you don't know, the most beautiful girl you ever saw in your life, and, when you've spotted her, see, as collateral identification, if she is n't with a nice, pleasant-faced woman old enough to be her mother — her mother, in fact — good-looking, too. They'll be the Fenelons. Introduce yourself and be pleasant. For Heaven's sake don't keep me now. I can't wait. Good-bye."

Valentine shrugged his shoulders. The idea of not waiting for an introduction rather amused him, but he took more than a pinch of salt with his friend's description of Miss Fenelon as the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. Fahey was half Irish. He was n't likely to find it easy to identify her. Beautiful girls are not at all uncommon in the Carlton restaurant. However he need n't worry about that for the present, and he turned again to the "Evening News."

Valentine surrendered his hat to the cloakroom attendant and looked into the Palm Court. There were

too many people for him to distinguish any separate couple, and since he did n't want to challenge the wrong women, he went, as so many others have done before and since, and studied the crowd from the glass-sided corridor which flanks the Court. No use. There were people he knew and people he did n't want to know, but as far as he could see no one even remotely answering to Martin Fahey's rapid description.

"Yes," the *maître d'hôtel* told him, "Mr. Fahey has engaged a table, but he is n't here. Fenelon? No, Mr. Barat, I don't know any ladies of that name. Yes, if any one asks for Mr. Fahey, I'll send to you at once."

Valentine was irritated. He did n't like being kept waiting. He went to the Haymarket entrance and looked about him and then, out of mere boredom, bought a "Globe." Mr. Lotinga did n't agree with his view of what would win the Friary Nursery that day. He tipped Kangaroo; called it, in spite of the big field, "the week's good thing." Well, it might be. It was n't any use being dogmatic. Charles Street was near enough and so, without a hat, Valentine strolled round to the post-office. "Kangaroo Haddock each way" was the telegram he sent, and that being interpreted from the mysteries of Mr. Wiseman's code meant that Kangaroo was to carry fifty pounds of Valentine's money — twenty-five to win, and the like amount "for a place."

He then went back to the Palm Court where the crowd had a little thinned, and where, yes, there were two ladies, one middle-aged certainly and one who it

might be supposed from the lines of her figure was young enough to be her daughter. Anyhow she was so sitting that it would n't be possible to see whether her face justified Martin Fahey's enthusiasm. Her lines suggested that it might — but then one never could tell: one of Wilkie Collins's heroines had a figure to dream about, but a face that would fairly be described as homely whether one gave the epithet the English or the American meaning. He'd have to chance it. The older woman was pleasing and that was something. Valentine made his way across to where they sat:—

“Mrs. Fenelon —?”

He had no need to say more. The lady looked at him with a mild speculation that seemed to ask what in the name of wonder he whom she did n't know could want.

“Yes, I am Mrs. Fenelon.”

“My name is Barat — Valentine Barat; I am a friend of Mr. Fahey's. He was kind enough to ask me to lunch to meet you. He's been trying to get you on the telephone to say that he's kept by his Chief at the Foreign Office — urgent public business that he can't neglect; something that only he can do, something in which Sir Edward Grey really needs him” — Valentine was carrying out his instructions to the letter — “and he told me to excuse him to you, that he will be here as soon as ever he can, and that we are not to wait for him but start lunch, if — if you'll let me act as a kind of temporary and not nearly so efficient host.”

“Certainly we will, Mr. — eh, Barat. And we can get to know you, can't we, Julie, while we're waiting for Mr. Fahey.”

The lady had one of those cooing, delicious voices that those who know America associate with the South; but it wasn't of the mother's voice that Valentine was thinking as she spoke and as they started to go into the restaurant, but of the daughter's face and of the daughter's eyes — such eyes, he told himself, as would alone have justified everything that Martin Fahey had said. They were of a pale blue, large, liquid, wondering, holding laughter in solution so that one saw her humour only when she chose to smile. They thrilled Valentine. And very likely — oh, it was surely certain — he would, as Martin Fahey's deputy, have to keep himself free of their charm. He was in a fiduciary position. He turned the long word over in his mouth, shook out his napkin, and, not daring to look again at Miss Fenelon, looked at her mother.

I almost called Mrs. Fenelon an old lady. That she was not. In the first place there are very few old ladies nowadays; and in the second, Mrs. Fenelon was not, one would guess, much more than forty. That is n't old. But she had hair which was whitening, and something told one that she was, now that her daughter was out and about, content to take second place, to be a satellite. "Julie" it was who did the choosing. "Mamma," as she called her mother, was useful and rather ornamental — and a dear; but she knew her place. And she was dressed in the height of sober fashion — in Paris obviously, and very well set up. Before, however, Valentine could recover himself sufficiently to string the words of some idle question together the *maître d'hôtel* pressed a menu upon him: —

"This is what Mr. Fahey has ordered, Mr. Barat. I shall serve it at once."

Valentine looked at the card, and Miss Fenelon, who had taken up its fellow in front of her, broke into a little peal of laughter.

"He's done it, Mamma. I did n't think he would — although I told you I was sure. And I'm going to eat both things. It's disgraceful that we live in Paris and have n't even tried them. But you and Mr. Barat" — she at least, Valentine delighted to notice, had the name pat — "can order mutton chops if you please. I'm sure Mr. Fahey's good-natured and won't mind. I wish he'd come, though."

Valentine, whose attention had been distracted and who had n't had time to read a word of what had been prepared for them, looked again. He knew his absent host to be more than a little curious about culinary matters. He was so himself. But — well, he'd never seen snails served in a fashionable London restaurant before. No wonder Miss Fenelon was amused. There were only two dishes apparently. The *escargots* were to be followed by *hérisson* — whatever that might be. But again the *maitre d'hôtel*:—

"Mr. Barat, Mr. Fahey said that with the *escargots* his guests were to drink a very old but light Chablis I have here, and with the *hérisson* a special Scotch whiskey that we have. Will that be acceptable?"

"Don't ask me, Jules — I wish Mr. Fahey was here. But what's this second dish? — what is a *hérisson* anyway?"

"Please don't tell Mr. Barat" — it was Miss Fenelon

who interrupted. "I know it was part of Mr. Fahey's plan that he should n't be told. He said you were a great gourmet, Mr. Barat, but that he did n't suppose you'd ever had the luck to eat a *hérisson*, and you should see how you liked it before you were told what it was. And don't you tell him, Mamma."

"I won't, my dear. I would n't spoil any one's fun. And Mr. Barat must n't be influenced by me when I say at once that I'll eat neither the snails nor the *hérisson*. Here, call him back" — this to Valentine — "and order me a fried sole and the mutton chop that Julie suggested just now — and I don't mind saying that I should have the same if I were you. Don't pay any attention to her; she's a child. I dare say she won't eat the things when it comes to the point."

"There you are, Mamma. First you say you won't try and influence Mr. Barat and then you tell him to follow your example. Besides, I expect he's often eaten snails — have n't you, Mr. Barat?"

Valentine said that he had, and liked them — but that he'd never eaten them in London. Perhaps, though, these came from Bradfield or some other Roman villa where the old Latin animal persisted.

"No, they came from Burgundy. Mr. Fahey promised that they should. I shall try one to begin with and if I don't like it I shall have half Mamma's sole. All I did was to promise Mr. Fahey that I'd try. And I'm going to keep my word. And here they come."

Anyway, Valentine said to himself, these strange foods were fulfilling a useful purpose in breaking the ice. They were on a friendly footing already. It would have

taken a long time to have got so far if there had n't been a topic immediately amusing and arresting to talk about. And somehow he was being cheered by something, a shade, an inflection, that told him that his friend did not know Miss Fenelon so very well. She spoke of him to her mother as "Mr. Fahey." Still that perhaps did n't mean so much. But Valentine's spirits rose.

And now he had to explain to Miss Fenelon exactly how to handle the long two-pronged silver fork which she found at the side of her plate and the like of which she had never seen before. Her mother looked on with a humorous twinkle.

"No, let me see you eat one first. Then I'll try — I promise. I dare say I shall like it, and anyhow my friends call me 'a sport' and I'll keep my word, although Mr. Fahey is n't here."

"It's, much more simple than eating oysters," Valentine answered, laughing. "Look here. You take the thing up by the fat part of the shell — eugh!" He had to put it down again: it was so hot. "You take it up like this with your hand and you stick the fork into its mouth, and then you give the fork a twist and pull it out, and the *escargot* — no, you must n't call it a snail: that makes it more difficult — comes with it. . . . And if you want to do the thing in style, you put your head back a little and pour the juice or gravy that's left in the shell into your mouth. Honestly I like them" — and he took another.

Miss Fenelon made a little grimace and followed carefully each of his movements. For a moment she looked

doubtful, and then a light of appreciation spread over her face. "It's jolly good," she said. "Mamma, you're missing something. Is n't she, Mr. Barat? But then she's conservative. She comes from the South. She's hopeless where new things are concerned—except in dress, are n't you, Mamma?" She broke off to tilt her pink chin backwards. Valentine thought her action delicious. Byron was all wrong. Why, it was like watching a woman put on her hat or arrange her hair.

"When I've got a home, and have given up living in my boxes as we do at present, I shall have a colony of snails and eat them regularly—and, yes, I will call them snails. I'll have a snail farm and make a fortune. But where does one find these odd-looking forks? I must get some."

Valentine took courage and said they were not so easy to get, but that if he might he'd find some for her. . . . They finished the dish like two children, eating not only their own but Mrs. Fenelon's share as well.

"And now, Mr. Barat, for the *hérisson*. That's where I have the advantage of you. At least I know what it is, although I've never eaten it. But I believe we ought to eat it in the gipsy way, baked in clay. That's not the way here, Mr. Fahey told me—oh, but here he is! Mamma, here's Mr. Fahey. We're very angry you're so late, are n't we, Mamina? We'd be angrier still if Mr. Barat had n't been such a good host. We've eaten all the snails, and we're waiting for the *hérisson* and we have n't told him what it is, and Mamma's a horrid coward and has been eating sole."

Martin Fahey sat down and smiled his excuses. "If

I had not been able to rely on your good nature, Mrs. Fenelon, and on Mr. Barat's efficiency, we should have had the Peace of Europe about our ears. Yes, oh, yes, I'm quite serious. The Chief and Mr. Asquith have gone off to Downing Street to lunch now the thing's settled. They asked me, but I said I was engaged. They could n't have done their work without me, they said — Grey 's like that: he's generous — but they'd let me have my pleasure alone since I wished it and now the danger's past. Madame, your health. Miss Fenelon, I looks toward you. Valentine Barat, I sees your ugly mug." Martin Fahey rattled on. Valentine could have kicked him. His very existence as a tardy host had been forgotten and here he had turned up just when they were getting on so famously without him. Why could n't his work, whether it was addressing envelopes or writing a *précis*, have kept him an hour longer? Besides, he was a jolly sight too familiar.

"So you liked the *escargots*? I knew you would. And now for the *hérisson*. Where is it?" Mr. Fahey looked about him for some one to order. "Don't wait for me. Bring in the calf. I'll catch up. And mind they give me the right whiskey, Jules."

The dish came. Valentine had never seen a haggis. This, he thought, looked like one. Perhaps *hérisson* was French for haggis. He asked. No, he was wrong. Anyhow it presented no difficulties in the eating. Mrs. Fenelon looked on with simulated disgust.

"Fall to! Let me see if you're a serious gourmet, Miss Fenelon. This is an unfailing test. Now do you like it? Yes? Hurrah! Now I'll tell you, Barat. It's a

hedgehog. Snails first, hedgehog after: they make one of Monsieur Escoffier's historic lunches. I'm not sure I did n't invent it myself, but no matter. I know what you're going to say — that Borrow or Peacock or some one says that the proper way of eating hedgehog is the gipsy way of rolling him up just as you catch him in clay and pitching him on to the fire, and that then when you think he's cooked you break the clay and the bristles come away with it and the thing's ready to eat. I've not tried that way. It's the English method, I suppose. Try Simpson's for that. The French kitchen's good enough for me."

Valentine had subsided. His mind did n't jump about like his friend's. Besides, he was, without any excuse, without any justification, infernally jealous. But Martin Fahey was n't going to monopolise the conversation. "Look here," he said, "I'm all behind and I'm talking too much. Let me catch up and then I'll talk again. Barat, you talk. Mrs. Fenelon, he's the greatest architect ever. Talk about your Grand Central Station in New York, why it is n't in it with the schemes that Barat's got in his head. Got in his head, did I say? Why, they're on paper. You've heard we're to have the biggest building in the world in London — *the* building. Well, it's *his* idea. He calls it his firm's or his father's, but that's only his Oxford modesty. I've got it too — the modesty, I mean. It's a failing. Why, Barat is up to his ears in it — in the building. He was only able to lunch here to-day because I told him what he'd miss if he did n't — no, I don't mean the snails, Miss Fenelon — and because if war had broken out as the result of

my neglecting my work his scheme would have been shunted for a while. He goes over to Paris every weekend to get ideas for it, don't you, Barat?" And with this last shaft Martin Fahey fell on his *escargots*.

"Mrs. Fenelon, I don't know whether you know our friend as well as I do. If you do you are n't paying any attention to him. He's — forgive me — talking through his hat, a congenial and congenital habit with him. It's my father whose scheme that is —"

"Don't listen to him. It's his modesty. What did I tell you?" Martin Fahey interjected between one snail and another.

What was left of the meal went off in high spirits. Valentine could n't forget his resentment, his jealousy, but he went far towards smothering it. They drank *tilleul* and sat for half an hour listening to the music, and would have sat longer if Miss Fenelon had n't asked for the time and insistently reminded her mother that they had an appointment with the dressmaker. As they prepared to leave, Valentine wondered if the fact that he was to find the forks would warrant his asking to be allowed to call. He had a feeling that there was n't much time to be lost, that Mrs. and Miss Fenelon were only birds of passage, but he had also a happier feeling that they were only acquaintances of Martin Fahey's and that in spite of his Irish enthusiasm his host had not fallen a captive to Miss Fenelon's charms. He must know at once.

"Mr. Fahey, we're going on Friday: bring Mr. Barat round to tea one afternoon, won't you? We're never out after five if we can help it."

Valentine did n't see why his visit should rest on Fahey's convenience. "He can't run the Foreign Office and be sure of being able to go out to tea, Mrs. Fenelon," he said. "Can't I come by myself? — I shall if I may."

"Of course you can. You'll be very welcome, won't he, Julie?" and Mrs. Fenelon and her daughter stepped into a waiting taxi. "The Stafford," she said, so that Valentine did n't even have to ask where he was to call.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH VALENTINE FINDS THAT IT IS A MISTAKE TO ALLOW PLEASURE TO INTERFERE WITH BUSINESS

MARTIN FAHEY and his guest walked back across St. James's Park together and Valentine wondered how best, without betraying the trembling of his spirit, he could extract the information about the Fenelons that he so keenly desired. He fell back on platitude:—

“Nice people. What part of America do they come from?”

“I’ve no idea. They are very nice people, but I really know them very little. From the South, I believe. There is n’t a Mr. Fenelon — he’s dead; and Mrs. Fenelon’s partly Belgian by extraction as they call it, I think. Archie, to whom they were very kind at Washington, — I believe he and my sister-in-law almost lived in their house, — asked me to call. But they’ve not been here long enough for me to see much of them. They seem to live in Paris.”

“Well, you are right about Miss Fenelon: she *is* a beauty.”

Fahey turned and looked at his friend and a quizzical look came into his eye. He resumed his irrepressible manner: “Oh — oh, yes. I see. . . . Well, let me tell you at once, Barat, that you’re doing exactly what I

proposed to myself you should do while I was shaving last Sunday morning. By the way, that's the worst of Sunday in London. You're more or less forced to shave yourself. I remember all about it. I'd just cut myself. No, don't sympathise: it was nothing at all. I'd dined with the Fenelons overnight and I was thinking to myself what a pity it was not to keep such an amiable woman and, specially, such a beautiful girl in England, and then I fell to wondering on which of my friends I'd bestow them. I don't mind telling you you were n't the first I thought of — but I came to the conclusion after weighing the pros and cons that you were the most suitable and the most likely to pull it off. And I arranged to-day to that end — even to the masterly stroke of turning up late. But here are my steps. Sorry I can't stop. I'll see you again some time." And he was gone.

Perhaps it was as well. Valentine knew Fahey was only talking nonsense, but he also knew that he had not lost the youthful habit of blushing. He turned into George Street, went at once to his room, forgot all about his wish to see the evening paper, sank into a chair, stared at the fire, and thought of Miss Fenelon.

Nor was it a small ferment into which his mind had been thrown. Julie Fenelon dominated his spirits. He tried to describe her to himself — and then found that he could n't conjure up her face. Like Ariel she was "an air, a touch, a feeling." He remembered that her lips were red, that her hair was of a kind of tawny gold that carried the sun with it, that she was tall and slim and that her hands were slim too. More he could n't say,

nor could he remember what she had talked of. And yet she was clever. . . .

It was not usual for Mr. Barat's son to stop till the office closed. The porter was surprised to find him at half-past five when he went round the rooms to see that all was in order and the windows locked. Valentine was surprised himself. He hurried out, and finding himself in the dark fog of a November night decided that he was making a fool of himself. No doubt Miss Fenelon was engaged. Anyhow he could n't hope to see much of her unless he followed them to Paris. He straightened his shoulders and determined to think no more of her — for the present at least. But all the same he did n't recover his usual poise and he'd got home and was dressing for dinner before he remembered that he'd forgotten all about his speculations, that he had n't, for the first time for months and months, searched the evening paper for the result of his bets. And now he'd have to wait till dinner was over. The "Evening Standard" was never delivered till they had sat down, and Mr. Barat would no more allow it to be brought to the table than he would allow any other of his unimportant habits to be upset.

Dinner at an end Valentine followed his father into the drawing-room and waited while he drank his tea and read and commented on the news. He had a particular reason for wishing to see that evening's results. It was almost the eve of the end of the racing season, and since his operations would be necessarily restricted when flat racing gave place to illegitimate sport, Valentine was plunging rather more wildly than usual. He had backed

four horses that day, and he'd arranged in his own mind that if any one of them won he was going to have a hundred pounds — a big bet even for him — on a horse in the last race of the day, a horse he had reason to fancy. But the field would be big and the price would be long and he had n't felt that he'd be safe enough in backing it unless he was "up" on the day, had something in hand to pay for it if it, as was likely enough, went down. Mr. Barat finished with the paper and handed it across to Valentine. He took it and read it scrupulously. In some things he would n't let his nerves betray him. He read the first page and the Raphael article on the second; he read what Mr. Marriott had to say about a picture show, and he glanced at the law reports. And then he came to the last page. Yes, the first of his horses had won — twenty-five pounds at three to one was seventy-five pounds in hand. The second had lost. The third again had won — twenty pounds at thirteen to eight: a gain of thirty-two pounds odd. The "Globe" tip, his fourth horse, Kangaroo, had come to nothing: it ran second at four to one, so that what he lost on its not winning he won back on its getting a place. Anyhow he would have had the hundred on Round the Corner in the last race . . . and Round the Corner had won . . . at a hundred to eight against. And he was n't on! He'd allowed himself to be so distracted that he'd forgotten all about the horse. Fahey's lunch had cost him nearly twelve hundred pounds. He might never have such a chance again. Why, twelve hundred would have lifted him out of all his troubles. And sitting now in his father's room he could n't even swear.

He stood up, turned his face to the fire, looked at himself in the glass, smiled in rather a twisted way, tried to remind himself that it was all in the game, that the horse might have lost and in that case he'd have saved a hundred and been glad. And then suddenly he remembered Miss Fenelon's eyes and he was glad.

"Good-night, Sir," he said; "I don't feel quite the thing: I'm going to bed."

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH VALENTINE PLUCKS UP COURAGE AND A RIVAL APPEARS

WHEN Valentine awoke the next morning he had the sensation of having lost something. Analysing his feelings, however, he came to the conclusion that the only thing he had lost was the peace of mind that goes when one falls in love. Of a certainty he had never been in love before, not truly in love. He thought with disgust of his past affairs, of those light loves in the portal who had helped to pass his time, to distract him, since he had come down from Oxford. As for his failure to back Round the Corner — well! He shrugged his shoulders. Perhaps if he'd backed it it would have come in last. He was n't a believer in that kind of luck — but still. Anyhow it could n't be helped now. The twelve hundred pounds would have removed all these other anxieties — but now a new one had come into his life, one that was so much more absorbing, so much more certain, so much more definite. He splashed about in an icy cold bath — it was his habit to continue the cold bath of summer until a chill rewarded his endurance — and told himself that now he had something worth striving for. Wrapping his bathrobe around him, and still glowing from the reaction, he sat down at the table in his room and wrote two notes — one to Mrs. Fenelon to say that he should

come to call on the very next day bringing with him the forks he had promised her daughter, the other to Martin Fahey asking him to telephone at once to George Street whether he could n't lunch with him this same day. Then, having finished his dressing, he went down to breakfast and looked at his father and wondered what he would say if he told him now that he was in love. Nothing very encouraging he was afraid.

Martin Fahey did n't telephone. He sent an answer:

DEAR BARAT, — It can't be done. I'm engaged already. Besides you don't want me for my *beaux yeux*. If you did I might manage it. All you want to do is to pump me. And I'm not going to be pumped. I've done all I can. It's up to you now, as the compatriots of the young lady would say. You have my blessing. Let me tell you, though, that little as I know about it I do know that you have a rival, a formidable rival. You remember Everard Porton who was at the House and whom you had that row with at the Union. I'll only add that he's got lots of money and is three years older and a decade more wicked than you are. On the other hand, he's handicapped with a moustache. Yours

MARTIN FAHEY.

"Hell!" Valentine said to himself. He had a particular dislike to Everard Porton, who had many of the things that he had n't got and whom he'd certainly vanquished completely in that debate to which Fahey alluded. No love had been lost between them in consequence. For one reason or another they had been, in

spite of the disparity of their years, in something of the same set at Oxford. Valentine used to look at Porton and wonder whether he always scowled or whether he kept that lowering visage for the occasions on which they met; and he used to wonder whether Porton would get any fatter. It was a vicious type and he'd never liked it. He liked it less than ever now.

But after all Valentine's liking or dislike for Everard Porton was a matter of profound unimportance to the issue. What did count was whether Miss Fenelon liked him. A "formidable rival" Fahey had called him. A rival is not necessarily an accepted suitor. If indeed Porton was an accepted suitor Fahey would know surely, and he'd have said so — and he'd have behaved differently too: he would n't have taken Valentine's obvious infatuation in quite that way. Porton was imposing, but he was fat; he was three years older, but he looked ten — he had a sinister air, Valentine thought; he was rich — something in mines — but he had no tastes. Well, there it was: the best man would not necessarily win, but he could try.

Somehow or other with the appearance of Julie Fenelon on the scene of his life Valentine dropped many of his lighter habits. Perhaps it was chagrin at having failed to pull off the really satisfactory coup that Round the Corner's win should have been, but, whatever the cause, he failed to continue his racing interests, and, as after all he knew absolutely nothing about the race-horse in any other than its aspect as a gambling machine, the whole association dropped away from his mind. No doubt, too, this was helped by the

fact that flat racing was in its last week. The "over the sticks" business had never attracted him in the same way.

As he could n't talk to Martin Fahey about Miss Fenelon there was nothing to do but to wait on the morrow. The getting of the *escargot* forks was an easy business. Could n't he do something else? Could n't he ask them to dine and to the play? It sounded rather trite — and then, too, it seemed a little like forcing the pace. He did n't know that American girls — and their mothers — were used to the pace being forced, and take it as an agreeable form of homage, meaning just as much as they choose it shall mean.

Came the next day. Something had been said of the ladies never being out after five. At that hour precisely Valentine was at Mrs. Fenelon's hotel. They received him in their own little sitting-room. It was full of flowers — more came just as he arrived: the gift of some one. Valentine cursed. Porton's energy he supposed — and for the matter of that he was right. His reception was as friendly as he could have hoped. They took up their relation where they had left it a couple of days ago. Miss Fenelon chaffed him on his *gourmandise*; Mrs. Fenelon smiled and said very little but was clearly amiable. Should he . . . ? Yes, he would:—

"Mrs. Fenelon, I heard you say you were going on Friday. I wish you and Miss Fenelon would take pity on my loneliness to-night and dine with me and go to the play — that is, if you have nothing else to do."

"Why, Julie, we'd like to, would n't we? We have n't anything to do, I think, have we? But there is n't much

time . . . oh! what a pity we can't — we have a friend dining with us — I did n't tell you, Julie, I asked some one to dine whom I met just now in Bond Street. I've only just remembered. Why don't you come and dine, too, Mr. Barat?"

"That's rather turning the tables on me, is n't it? I'll tell you what" — Valentine was gaining assurance — "I've taken a box for the new Hawtrey piece: it was only produced last night, so I thought you would n't have seen it. I'll dine with you very gladly and then we can all go to the play and you can, all three of you, sup with me afterwards."

"Mamma, that'd be jolly. We'll do that, won't we? But who's your friend? Who did you ask to dinner, Mamma?"

"Only Mr. Porton, dear — I'm sure he'd like to go to the theatre. I asked him, though, for eight o'clock. Won't that be rather late? But perhaps we could telephone and ask him to come half an hour earlier. Do you know if he's got a telephone, Julie?"

"I do, Mrs. Fenelon. I know Mr. Porton. He was at Oxford with me. You mean Everard Porton, don't you? We shall find him in the telephone book. Let me look."

Mr. Porton's number was easily found. Looking for it, Valentine ground his teeth. Still the happening would have its advantages. He'd at least be able to form some idea, seeing his rival and Miss Fenelon together, how the land lay.

"You telephone, Julie. Explain it the best way you can, but don't let him think we want to put him off.

He's been very polite, and I should n't like him to think that."

Miss Fenelon called for the number and her mother turned to talk to Valentine who, however, had only half an ear for his hostess's conversation.

"So you were at Oxford with Mr. Porton. This country's so small that every one seems to know every one else. We like him very much. He was very polite to Julie in St. Moritz last summer . . ."

"Yes, it's Mr. Porton I want. Can't I speak to him?
— Yes, I'll hold on."

Valentine explained that he knew Mr. Porton not very well; that they'd hardly met since they came down.

"Is that you, Mr. Porton? This is Miss Fenelon. I'm so glad to hear that Mamma's asked you to dinner, but she did n't tell you" — Miss Fenelon was a diplomatist — "that we've another guest and that we're all going to the theatre after. We're to be taken. What's that? Of course you're to come. We shall be very angry if you throw us over, sha'n't we, Mamma? — Nothing. I was only saying to Mamma that we'd be very cross. All I wanted was to tell you to come to dinner at half-past seven instead of eight. No, of course he'll be delighted. All right, good-bye. I'll explain when we meet. Good-bye."

"Now, Mr. Barat, I'm going to treat you like an old friend — by the way, Mamma, I ought to have told Mr. Porton who it is he's to meet — and say to you that if we're to dine at half-past seven and stop up late, Mamma at least must go and rest. Go along, Mamma. I need n't rest, so you must n't move, Mr. Barat. We

can talk a little. I'll send you away directly. But it does n't take me very long to dress."

Left alone, Valentine and Miss Fenelon chatted, and he did his best to discover in what directions her interests lay. It was n't difficult. Julie Fenelon had the frank transparency that is the happy heritage of American girls. If she liked a thing or a person or a book or a play or a picture she liked it. She did n't wait to find out whether it was the thing to like, or whether her companion would approve of her liking it. And the best of it all was that she liked the things that Valentine liked. The time passed too quickly. She knew all about the Great Project and cross-examined Valentine as to his share in it; and luckily she took his practical ignorance of any other details than had appeared in the papers for a natural modesty and a dislike to talking about himself and his own work. It was nearly half-past six before he took his leave, more deeply involved than ever.

Solomon's was not shut. Valentine had time to order for both his hostesses some theatre flowers. Certainly his assurance was growing.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH MRS. FENELON GIVES A LITTLE DINNER-PARTY AND AN EXTREME OF FOLLY IS EXHIBITED

HE had n't had much time to get to Westminster to dress and to return to the Stafford, but Valentine had made up his mind that he'd arrive before Everard Porton. He did — and had to kick his heels. The ladies would be down directly, he was told. But before they could appear, their other guest, punctual to the moment, arrived. He looked at Valentine and nodded. Evidently it did n't occur to him that Valentine was the Fenelons' friend, and, not liking him, he saw no reason for starting a conversation. It would be as well to undeceive him, Valentine thought. Porton was warming a toe at the hall fire and almost scowled — or so it seemed — when he was approached.

"We're both of us dining with Mrs. Fenelon, Porton, I think, and then I am to have the pleasure of your company at the Prince of Wales's. I'm glad you can come."

"Oh, yes — thanks. I'm glad." He did n't look it. "I've not seen much of you since we came down. You're a builder or something of the sort now, are n't you?"

"Something of the sort," Valentine answered. He knew that Porton was n't really ignorant of what he

was doing. "A builder," however, sounded less important, commoner than an architect, he supposed. It trembled on his lips to ask Porton whether he was n't something in the City, a half-commission man? He did n't, however; he smiled pleasantly and at that moment Mrs. Fenelon, with the rustling of fine clothes, appeared. "Julie will be down directly. She's always late, is n't she, Mr. Porton?"

Poor Valentine! Mrs. Fenelon's harmless, thoughtless ending to her sentence bade fair to take his appetite away. Who was this Porton, gross and lacking in amenity, that he should be appealed to as an authority on Miss Fenelon's habits? And anyhow Miss Fenelon's mother had traduced her. She followed a moment after, looking — looking pretty enough to eat, slim, smiling, cared for, and wearing, yes, wearing Valentine's flowers. And so for the matter of that was Mrs. Fenelon.

The dinner of the hotel had not been good enough for Mrs. Fenelon's guests. She went up vastly in Valentine's estimation when at her bidding he examined the menu. "You're such a gourmet, Mr. Barat, that Julie and I took a lot of trouble — and of course there was n't much time. I hope you'll like what we've ordered. You must say if you don't — and so must you, Mr. Porton. By the way, you're a water-drinker, I know.—I've remembered your Vichy. But for you, Mr. Barat, I had n't the courage to order until I knew whether you'd drink claret or burgundy or champagne."

Valentine asked for burgundy.

"That's right. You'll drink burgundy, too, won't you, Julie? I know I will. I have n't patience with

people who will only drink champagne. They say it's women's fault that one is seldom offered anything else. Perhaps it is. There are all sorts of occasions when champagne is 'indicated,' as the doctors say. But it's a symbol more than anything else, a symbol of gaiety, of irresponsibility. Perhaps one wants it at supper — although I'm not even sure of that. No, the real wine is a red wine. But then you can't drink red wine with your soup and fish . . ."

And so she rattled on, to Valentine's amusement. He found Mrs. Fenelon much to his taste: the disagreeable impression had gone. He must n't expect to subedit every one's conversation, he said to himself.

And even Porton, Vichy-drinker though he was, came out in a better light during dinner. He was ponderously gay, and informed, and he did n't give Valentine the impression of knowing the Fenelons so very much better than he did himself. That was as it should be. Perhaps Fahey was under a misapprehension.

The conversation was general. Only now and then did it break up and then through no one's fault, and it quickly became general again. The dinner was too soon at an end.

Valentine looked at his watch. "That's right," Miss Fenelon said. "Every theatre for me is the first theatre I've ever been to. I simply hate not being there when the curtain goes up. Mamma, please order taxis. And we ought to go and get ready."

Waiting for a moment in the hall, and as Porton was being helped into his coat, Julie Fenelon turned to

Valentine, touched the roses on her breast, and made a half curtsey. Her ways, her movements, delighted him. He was beside himself with happiness.

Now, however, the duties of a host were his. Two taxis had been called. It was his business to drive with Mrs. Fenelon. "It's my turn now: I manage all this," he said. "Mrs. Fenelon and I will take this first taxi — which is incidentally the best-looking — and Porton, perhaps you'll follow with Miss Fenelon." It went against the grain — oh, so much. "But I have to be a perfect little gentleman," he said to himself.

The play was the regular Hawtrey play. One hopes there will always be a Hawtrey play with Charles Hawtrey to play in it. Porton seized two out of the three intervals to go and smoke. That was convenient. Then supper — like all such suppers when one is in love.

"Now, Julie, the lights are going out; we must go. Mr. Barat, we *have* enjoyed ourselves. Certainly it's been the jolliest evening I've had since we came to London. Now, please don't forget you've got to come and see us when you are in Paris. We're always at the Hotel de France et de Wellington. We have a little apartment there. It's old-fashioned but it suits us. Good-bye, and thank you very much."

"Thank you, and do come and see us," was all Miss Fenelon said, and Valentine found himself left standing with Porton in the hall.

He wanted to be alone now, and to think, to reconsider the ground he had covered, to reckon up his position — but no such luck!

"Which way are you going, Barat? I'll walk a little way with you."

They crossed Pall Mall and went down the Duke of York's Steps.

"Look here, Barat, I have to thank you for your share of this evening. I do. But there's something else I want to say. I see that you are inclined to pay attention to Miss Fenelon —"

There is a lamp-post just as the railings curve at the turning into the Horse Guards Parade. Valentine found its light opportune. He stopped, and put his hand gently on Porton's arm:—

"Let us stand here for a moment. I shall be able to see you better. What was it you were saying?"

Porton seemed to colour a little. "I was saying that I noticed that you were inclined to pay attention to Miss Fenelon and I was going on to say that I should prefer you to exercise your attractions in some other direction. I shall consider any further exhibitions of that kind offensive to me personally." He really did talk in that pompous way.

"So . . . !" Valentine's face stiffened. "You feel that. Do you wish me to understand that you are engaged to Miss Fenelon?" He paused. "Ah, I thought not. Well, I will tell you at once — you are no longer my guest — that I find what you say offensive to me now. Further, I think, my poor Porton, that you are talking rot. However, I will pay no further attention to it. No doubt for some reason you are above yourself. Kindly turn back." And Valentine moved on and left his confessed rival, left him standing under the lamp-

post, perhaps biting his lips, but not, one is afraid, conscious of his own folly.

"Really, really!" Valentine said to himself. "I wonder if I could behave like that. I hope not."

He went home, went at once to bed, and slept.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH MR. BARAT IS AGAIN ATTACKED AND VALENTINE BRUISES HIS HEAD AND HIS HEART

SO far so good, but what does one do now?" The question was in Valentine's thoughts the next morning. He'd seen Miss Fenelon just three times. He did n't suppose that she or her mother were any blinder than the rest of their sex. They must have seen — why, even at Martin Fahey's lunch — that he had fallen head over ears in love. Certainly they had n't repulsed him. Rather the other way. They'd admitted him to their circle. He was to go and see them in Paris. But he could n't in decency go this very week-end and challenge their notice with some new hospitality before they'd even had time to take the tissue paper out of their sleeves. Audacity was all very well, but there was a limit. Was n't there some other way in which he could let Miss Fenelon know that he was thinking of her? Was n't there some interest of hers that he could minister to? There is an etiquette in these matters, a convention. He could hardly send flowers from London and the gifts which he could make with propriety were circumscribed. They had spoken last night of Peacock. Julie Fenelon had read one of his books. "That does interest me," she said; "to think that Peacock was Meredith's father-in-law! Of course I'll read all he's written now." Valentine turned to his shelves and took

down "Crotchet Castle" in that jolly little buff edition of Dent's with Dr. Garnett's notes. It was an easy matter to do it up and post it to the Hotel de France et de Wellington. Perhaps it would get there earlier than Miss Fenelon herself. So much the better. He would n't write a letter to go with it. His name on the flyleaf would show who had sent it.

And now again Valentine was driven back on himself, on his own thoughts, on a consideration, when he was n't thinking of Julie Fenelon, of his financial difficulties, and very much of his relations with his father and whether there was n't some way of penetrating that hard rind, of making Mr. Barat see that he was not necessarily an unworthy son, an unworthy assistant.

That night after dinner he broached again the question of his future, and, more immediately, of his place in the office. "Look here, Sir"—awkwardness, shyness, made him begin badly; Mr. Barat looked at him with a mild astonishment—"I do wish you'd give me some responsible work to do. I'm sick of hanging about doing nothing, or practically nothing. I know you don't approve of the way I spend a lot of my time. Well, I'm young enough—and old enough, too—to alter all that. I am altering it. Your hands will be fuller and fuller now. I don't think, Sir, you know how hard I've worked—although I've never had much practical work to do. It's all been theory so far. Please give me a chance."

Mr. Barat continued to sip his China tea—"a tea beyond anything Chinese," such as Leigh Hunt thought necessary for an elderly widower—and did n't trouble to look at his son. If he had he might have thought it

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worth while to pay a little more attention to Valentine's nervous periods. The boy's very eyes would have told him how serious he was. But no: he was n't in the habit of considering what Valentine had to say as of any importance.

"My dear Valentine, I have seen no signs of that hard work of which you speak; I have seen no signs of your altering those of your habits of which you tell me I don't approve" — this last was hardly to be wondered at; the change was barely forty-eight hours old! — "I will be frank with you. What I have seen, and have seen with growing although unspoken reprobation, is that you have chosen since you came home from abroad to live a life which is quite foreign to me and to my tastes, a life which is entirely remote from any interest I have or any other member of your family. I think it a discreditable life. I'm not blind, you know. I let you see once before that I noticed more than you gave me credit for. How can you expect me to take seriously a young man whose favourite reading is the 'Sportsman' and, I suppose, Ruff's 'Guide to the Turf,' and whose notions of enjoyment seem to consist of visits to Paris, musical comedies, and theatrical dances — "

"I've not been to any dances, Sir, since you spoke to me — no dances theatrical or otherwise."

Mr. Barat raised his eyebrows. "I'm glad to hear it. It's a point in your favour — unless it's a close season for dancing." Valentine knew his father so little that he did n't know whether the parenthetical addition was a bitter touch or something said to give a little more humanity to the conversation. He feared the worse.

Mr. Barat continued: "An architect's work is responsible — and arduous. He has his clients to think of; he has the public. When I have reason to think — if I have reason to think, I should say perhaps — that you are fit for that responsibility you will not find me slow to encourage you. But at present I see no sign of any justification for my entrusting you with any of the work I have myself undertaken to do. All the same I do not wish you to distress yourself unduly, or even to do violence to your habits. I have no objection to telling you that whether I live or die my fortune is sufficient to provide for your future apart altogether from the question of your becoming an architect or remaining a — or remaining a young man who prefers to amuse himself. Now I think we've had enough of this conversation: here is the evening paper."

Valentine saw that the discussion was at an end. He could but subside — miserably. He took the paper his father offered him and through the tears of mortification that were in his eyes tried to make out what its leading article was about.

"Valentine" — Mr. Barat was speaking again — "Valentine, what you have been saying reminds me. You are sufficiently well paid at the office for the work you are supposed to do, but I dare say you find that the life you lead runs away with money. It's your birthday next week. You'll be twenty-five, I think. With the beginning of December I shall allow you two hundred and fifty a year instead of a hundred and fifty — that'll make four hundred in all. . . . No, you need n't thank me."

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"Perhaps it *is* all my fault," Valentine said to himself when he was alone. "I don't understand. Why can't I get through somehow?"

And then there came another thought. What good was an additional hundred a year — two pounds a week — in such difficulties as his?

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH VALENTINE HAS AN IDEA AND A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE IS MADE AND IS NOT REJECTED

THE getting through of the following weeks was for Valentine an exceedingly dull affair. He felt himself out of sympathy with nearly all his ordinary diversions and not particularly wishing to see any of his friends. If only he had solid, real work to do!

Then suddenly an idea struck him, and no sooner had it effected entrance into his brain than he put it into execution. He became busy in truth. First he secured the exact measurements and a detailed plan of the Leicester Square site; then he busied himself, through the office and elsewhere, with finding out exactly what the Great Project was to comprise; — and then, all alone, unaided, he turned to and started to pretend that the work was his, that he stood in his father's shoes. It was a bitter make-believe, but at the back of his mind was the idea that come what might, and however many mistakes of ignorance he might commit, he'd carry it through to the end, and that then perhaps at about the time when the building was actually in being he'd show his father his plans and perhaps convince him that he had grit, and a little knowledge, and much desire for work.

Two things now occupied Valentine's mind — to the exclusion of everything else. First were his thoughts of

Julie Fenelon, with whom on one pretext or another he managed to keep up a very occasional correspondence, and second, his ambition. It was months before he had made any true progress with his plans. It was so easy to emulate the newspaper competitors and to draw fine elevations without any idea how they could be utilised or of the basic necessities imposed by the site and the requirements of the whole scheme. It was indeed a different matter to start at the beginning and to work in imagination and on paper at the clearing and levelling of the ground, at the foundations, at all the early plans, and at the constructional and engineering problems. Much of the knowledge he had to acquire as he went along.

His only relaxations were an occasional visit to Paris — very different visits from those he had been wont to pay and against which his father had girded. He and Miss Fenelon came gradually to know one another better and better. She would postpone amusements till he came; she used to count on his coming. And as for Mrs. Fenelon — well, it was n't clear whether she realised the way in which things were surely drifting. Anyhow she welcomed Valentine: it left her free to play bridge: she trusted him. "I like your Mr. Barat, my dear," she said; "he's a gentleman. I don't mind how much you go out with him!"

Valentine, however, did n't want to force the pace too rapidly. He was content to believe that Julie Fenelon knew his mind. He had told her as much as his English shyness would let him of his difficulties with his father, and of how, far from having any share or part in his

father's activities, he was treated in his father's house and in his father's office as of no account. "But," he added, "I have a plan." He was n't explicit, but he told her enough to make her understand that soon, at the latest by the time that the Great Project was an accomplished fact, he hoped to be in a position to force his father's hand. "And if I can do that I have no fear but that I shall be able to make a career for myself."

She looked at him with eyes full of sympathy:—

"Don't tell me any more about it, Mr. Barat, than you choose. But I am very interested. I wish I could help you in whatever it is."

Together, hand in hand, so to speak, they explored Paris. They got to know, as few French people knew it, the old Paris that was passing so rapidly. On one Sunday they would go out to Port-Royal, on another to lunch *chez* Cabasso and almost *chez* Corot by the lake at Ville d'Avray; they would climb the hill of Montmartre and wonder whether Gabrielle d'Estrées really lived in the old building that claimed her; and they'd sit for an hour of the afternoon in the Moulin de la Galette, drink bad coffee, and watch the hundred revolving couples dancing as if their very lives depended on their wringing every ounce of enjoyment out of the passing minute.

The thought of Everard Porton troubled Valentine no more. Now and again he heard that he had turned up in Paris; he had entertained or been entertained by the Fenelons. Miss Fenelon seemed to like him. He had evidently more time on his hands than Valentine had. But there was no need, he felt, for jealousy. . . .

As a matter of fact there was rather more need than he knew. Julie Fenelon liked admiration; she had about her lots of the old Eve. Porton had long made it clear to her that he was a suitor for her hand. He had regularised his position by getting the passive approval of Mrs. Fenelon, who liked him but who was n't going to attempt to influence her daughter in his or any other direction. She preferred Valentine as a matter of fact — but *he* had n't had Porton's enterprise: *he* had n't asked her permission to pay his addresses to her daughter. Not that that troubled Mrs. Fenelon very much. Julie was wise enough to look after her own affairs. And Julie looked after them. To be frank, she did n't discourage Mr. Porton, but she preferred Valentine, liked him better in every way, but she did n't understand his mind nearly as well as he thought she did. She'd sometimes feel that his restraint showed him to be purely friendly. She wondered if he was n't merely pursuing an agreeable acquaintanceship.

And Everard Porton made no secret about his mind, about his wishes. He went one day to the length, in a rather matter-of-fact, a rather pompous, way of proposing for Julie Fenelon's hand, and she had n't the heart — nor indeed the wish, just then — to refuse him.

She smiled prettily and taking the hand that he held out to her between two pink fingers, dropped it back on to his knee. Then she laughed: "No, Mr. Porton. Don't let's talk about that. I do like you, you know. I think you're a good sort, sympathetic and all that, but . . . Well, I don't want to be engaged and I certainly don't want to be married. Let's be friends . . . Oh, yes, I

don't mind: you can ask me again in a few months if you like. Perhaps I shall feel just as I feel now; perhaps I shall feel differently. You see. Now, let's go back to the hotel, find Mamma, and have some tea."

Everard Porton's face did n't change: he kept himself well in hand. But there was one thing he'd like to be a little more sure about. "Miss Fenelon, may I ask you one question?"

"Of course; if you don't keep me too long from my tea you may ask me a dozen."

"Is there any one else you care for?"

"No, there is not. I like to be free. I'm still young."

Julie Fenelon was not being entirely frank — perhaps not even with herself. But she was sure that there was no reason in her life for dismissing this present agreeable suitor.

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH THE GREAT PROJECT GROWS AND A MONEY-LENDER IS EMPLOYED

VALENTINE'S months passed slowly. In the first place he was busier than he had ever been in his life: his zeal for the prosecution of his self-imposed and almost secret task knew no bounds; in the second he was happier: he felt he was working at last and would surely surprise his father, and he had Julie Fenelon's friendship and, as he hoped, her love. Not that he saw so very much of her. Paris was farther off nowadays — now that he was leading a more sober life and not constantly making such inroads on his banking account as had caused four pounds fifteen shillings and ninepence, the first-class fare, to seem as nothing, or else adding to it as the result of some occasional and lucky coup. And then suddenly to his consternation — and to Everard Porton's, too, for the matter of that — the Fenelons were caught up and carried on some matter of business back to America, some question of investments that was not to take long, but which lingered on and on. Perhaps, too, Julie Fenelon was in no hurry to return. Being made much of in her own home, in New York, in Washington, was great fun!

And in the mean time the vast edifice in Leicester Square was growing apace. It absorbed all Mr. Barat's energies. Almost he could be said to live in the building

or in the offices which controlled its destinies. He would start earlier than had been his wont from Great College Street and sometimes he would work in Leicester Square far into the night, alone or with Fergusson, always jealous lest his plans and designs should become common property, always doing himself or through his old henchman what any one of his assistants could have done as well.

It had not, one might imagine, been part of Mr. Barat's original plan to shroud his Project in such secrecy, but either his own or the nimble brain of one of his colleagues had conceived the just idea that the public liked mystery, was attracted by the very fact that it was ignorant of all but the very outlines of what was going on behind those great hoardings, and that their ultimate success would be increased by just that degree to which they were able to build in figurative darkness. And everything was conceived in such a manner and on such a scale as to impress. One instance: the giant hoardings had been put up not anyhow as if they were only to be there for a week, but with an attempt at decorative and architectural effect. No advertisements were allowed to cloud the purity of their colour. "If the north side of Leicester Square's to be blotted out," Lord Butterby is reported to have said, "it shall be blotted out with something that'll make the beggars sit up and take notice."

Valentine rather avoided the business side of the hoardings. He had no work there as it happened, and he did n't want what he might see to influence his own vision of the way in which the site should be occupied,

the problem worked out. He found later on that his abstention had not passed unnoticed by his father, and that it had been attributed to carelessness of the whole affair. But of that he knew nothing at the time. He went about his own task with a vigour all the greater as he realised that the time was soon coming when even the highest of practicable hoardings would be inadequate to hide any longer the fruit of his father's genius.

Such holidays as he took — and indeed he was working so hard that some holiday became a necessity — he spent in getting material and ideas in France and in Germany. He had little experience to enable him to get over this difficulty and that as they presented themselves. He had no choice but to fall back now and again in the most literal way on the experience of the past. He would have gone to New York in this manner if he had dared to absent himself for so long as such a journey would take. And as the real building grew and soared so did the phantom building that Valentine was working out on paper.

But in his heart sometimes he felt the work to be a ghastly make-believe. Only if it could be turned to impress his father would it find justification.

It was about this time that Valentine's financial affairs reached a new crisis, and he found himself at last actually in the hands of money-lenders. It was a singularly easy matter to carry through. One or two of his creditors having come, as they said, to the end of their patience, he was threatened with lawyers' letters. A year or two before he'd owed more money, but he'd

been able to keep his various accounts in better circulation. When he had backed a winner for any useful sum, it was so easy to divert a little of it into the pockets of his hosier or his tailor. Now that he did n't even try to back winners, now that he bought fewer things and in some directions bought nothing at all, he became at once a customer less to be considered.

He knew — or he thought he knew — that it would n't be any use applying to his father for help, and his pride forbade his walking round to the trouser and shirt makers and explaining his position. The only course that he could take, as far as he could see, was to raise money temporarily at whatever rate of interest might be imposed. After all, he was now living below his income, and at the end of every month he owed less.

With Valentine to make up his mind was to act. Choosing at random one of the half-dozen "firms" whose names had stuck in his memory, he left George Street one morning, crossed the park, reached that region of extravagant finance of which perhaps the Burlington Arcade may be considered the centre, and climbed a flight of stairs to the dull and stuffy offices of Mr. R. Leverton Fordyce, Financier.

Now Mr. Fordyce has little to do with this story, so it is hardly necessary to waste time or trouble on a description of his surroundings or of his own grey and decorated personality. It is enough to say that he cross-examined Valentine as to why he wanted money, how much he wanted, when he'd be able to pay it back — and, after taking twenty-four hours, for inquiry presumably, gave him two thirds of what he'd asked, in

crisp new Bank of England notes. There was to be no repayment for nine months — Valentine had suggested that period himself — and then only a third would have to be paid, another third a month later, and so on. "If you want to renew these bills I don't doubt it can be arranged, Mr. Barat," Mr. Fordyce added in the most gentlemanly way as he folded up the acceptances Valentine had given him and locked them up in his safe. The sum Valentine carried away in his pocket was six hundred pounds. He did n't care to remember what the three bills he had given amounted to. Anyhow having done a foolish thing he followed it with a wise one. He walked down to Piccadilly, paid the six hundred into his bank, and spent a couple of hours that evening writing cheques for his tradesmen. He exhausted the money more quickly than he had thought possible. His rough estimate of his actual needs had been a thousand: he'd asked nine hundred and had got six. Well, it did n't so much matter. Not all the accounts were equally pressing — he'd be able to pay the rest in course of time out of his income, and still have enough for his expenses and to save against the first of the bills falling due. The net immediate result was that his mind felt a great deal lighter and that he was able to work with more pleasure and with far more energy.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH MARTIN FAHEY BECOMES URGENT AND JULIE AND VALENTINE LUNCH AT LE VRAI ROBIN- SON

IT was a day or two later that Martin Fahey came in to see him.

"Look here, Barat: I'm curious about that building of your father's. Take me in to see it as far as it's gone, won't you? Those damned screens spoil my appetite or my evening every time I drive through Leicester Square or Shaftesbury Avenue."

Valentine explained that he could n't. He was frank. He told Fahey that in effect — at least since any progress had been made — he had n't been on the site himself. "Yes, I might go, I suppose, if I wanted to — but I don't want to — not just yet anyway! But although I could go, I could n't take any one. My father's made a rule about it. Old Buttery himself wanted to take an American millionaire friend of his over the other day, but my father would n't let him. But you'll see soon enough. As a matter of fact they're going to take the top part of the Leicester Square hoarding down next week — so I'm told."

"That, my dear young friend, is n't any use to me. I know I can see the whole blessed place busy as an antheap and buzzing like a machine when it's finished, go and live in it too if I like — which I shan't. What I

wanted was to see it before every one else. But it does n't matter. And now to turn to a very different and much more important subject. Seen the Fenelons lately?"

"No, I have n't. They've been in America."

"Yes, I know that, and I know they're back — and so do you. And it's just about that I came in. I did n't really care a damn about your silly old building, only I thought I'd lead up to the subject. Are n't you letting the grass grow under your feet, my boy?"

Valentine blushed. He'd never discussed the matter with any one and he found it difficult. "I don't know what you're driving at, Fahey."

"Well, I'll tell you. The Fenelons have been back a week. I've seen 'em as a matter of fact. You have n't. Porton has. You had as good a chance of being on the spot as he had. You'll lose Miss Fenelon as sure as a house if you don't buck up. I don't mean she said so to me in so many words, but I do say that she's a bit hipped at your carelessness. She'll take Porton out of chagrin if you're not jolly careful."

Valentine paused, and thought. "Fahey, I'm very grateful to you. I think perhaps I've been a fool. I'd hoped they'd come back — as they first thought they would — by a Cunarder, and then I'd have gone down — indeed, I'd made all arrangements — to meet them at Fishguard. It happened that when they did arrive in Cherbourg I was most horribly tied up with work — and have been since. But I'll go over on Friday."

"No, dear child, you won't: you'll go over with me — to-night. I've got to go, just as I went last week, on some Embassy business. And I'm going to take you

along with me. Now don't argue. Nine-o'clock train — Charing Cross. Write and tell Julie Fenelon you're coming."

Valentine did better than that. He telegraphed.

Whatever the Embassy business was that took Fahey to Paris, it was n't to occupy all his time. He left his friend in the early morning sun of the Gare du Nord with very exact instructions that however he spent his own and Miss Fenelon's day he was to bring her and her mother to dine with him that evening at eight o'clock sharp. "They've already accepted, so that's all right. Now listen: Pré-Catalan if it's a really fine clear night, Lapérouse if it's grey. One other thing: you have to pull this affair off to-night. You *have* to, mind. It's got to be carried beyond the possibility of Porton queering your pitch; see?" And he was off, leaving Valentine to drive alone to the Normandy with a curious, childish pain in the pit of his stomach. So he was to put his fate to the touch to-day, was he? Well, there were more sensible people in the world than Fahey, but perhaps he had a wisdom of his own. And he spoke as if he had something else than mere prejudice in his mind. Perhaps Porton was more formidable than he had thought. Perhaps he himself had been slow. Anyhow he had to fetch Julie Fenelon at ten o'clock. And then, having a sense of physical economy, he tumbled into bed and slept, in spite of the sun and all the manifold noises of the rue Saint-Honoré, until he was called at nine o'clock.

For a minute or two Valentine lay and blinked at the

sun which the curtains were incapable of shutting out. So to-day was to settle things. To-day would do as well as another, perhaps. And at least it was a fine day. He tumbled out of bed and into his bath and then slipped on his clothes with spring in his heart. He had no sort of doubt now as to the sequel. All the same he dressed himself, oh, so carefully, and insisted on his usual barber going over his chin again and again, and he chose a flower that he thought would bring him luck and, at the same time, he bought a large growing rose for Mrs. Fenelon. *She* should not think him careless.

At ten o'clock he was asking for Mrs. Fenelon at the desk of the Hotel de France et de Wellington.

Mrs. Fenelon was not yet visible, but Mademoiselle would like him to come upstairs at once.

A six-months' absence in America had made a difference to Julie Fenelon. Incidentally it had made a woman of her. Perhaps it had made her just a little harder — no, surer is the word; it had not made her less pretty, less charming. Not for a moment did she hide her pleasure in seeing Valentine. "I'm more glad to see you than any one I've seen since we got back," she said, giving him both hands. And her eyes danced, and she looked so gay and so pleased that almost he threw his plans to the winds and folded her then and there in his arms. But no . . . they were to have the day first, just such another as they had so often had before, but even sweeter. It would be time enough to-night.

"Let me look at you and see if you've grown, Mr. Barat. I like your new suit. Who gave you your flower? Oh, you bought it, did you . . . Well, I'll wear it. I'm

not sure that a man looks well with a button-hole. Perhaps he does, though. Come here: I'll give you one to take its place" — and she picked a carnation from a bowl on the table. "I didn't buy that, let me tell you, Sir. There are people who remember Julie Fenelon's come back to Europe and don't leave her to walk about by herself for a whole week."

Miss Fenelon was quite truthful. She had n't bought the flowers. Her mother had come back from the flower market the previous afternoon carrying an armful of them.

More happy, more gay, more enticing, more beautiful than ever Valentine found Julie Fenelon that morning. And as that was all part of her plan things might be said to be marching very well.

"Now what do we do?" she said. "I've told Mamma she'll see us when she does. As a matter of fact we're dining out to-night, but perhaps we could take you —"

"You will. Fahey's asked me. I'm going to take you."

"Right-o! But where shall we go now? It's fine enough. Let's do the thing I remember with most pleasure of all our excursions of last year. Let's be vulgar and go to Robinson for lunch — we'll have a taxi and forget everything but amusement."

Valentine minded not at all where he went as long as he had Julie Fenelon with him. And her choice was justified. The day had all the pleasures that childhood, and Paris, and love in the air can give. Bloom was on the branches, the air was stirred with a light wind, even the little mangy donkeys which hung about on the road

at Sceaux-Robinson hoping not to be hired looked as if they might trot in the sun for very joy. They found no crowd, for it was neither a Sunday nor a fête day; no one disputed with them the right to occupy the topmost platform in the highest tree in Le Vrai Robinson. It was n't a good lunch, but what did that matter? It tasted so good as they ate it among the leaves with the birds singing round them; and they both lived in their childhood over again in the joy of pulling up basket after basket. The waiter, they insisted, should remain below on the firm ground. They'd do all the work themselves. He thought queerly of them, but that did n't matter. It is the French way to have such thoughts.

It seemed to Valentine that they had laughed all day.

Miss Fenelon's last words were: "Now don't keep us waiting a single second. I'm enjoying my day too much. If we're to dine in the Bois we must start at half-past seven."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FAHEY BONELESS SOLE

THE porter at the Normandy smiled when Valentine announced that he would require something a great deal smarter than a taxi to take him and two ladies to the Bois that evening. He had had, that porter, so much, and so varied an experience of this guest of the hotel. Valentine, he would have told you, unconsciously quoting a very modern poet, had "strange hours of seeking and leaving his bed." Not that he minded: it was all in the day's work. Still for a gentleman to arrive home in evening dress and an opera hat at the very hour at which most of the other English-speaking guests were starting out on their shopping was not always convenient. It looked odd. . . . But he'd noticed a change lately. Mr. Barat was getting older and perhaps more sober.

Both Mrs. Fenelon and her daughter were waiting when Valentine's car drew up at the door of the France et Wellington. Soon in the warm sunset light they were speeding up the Champs Élysées and almost as soon they found themselves in the enchanted avenues of the Bois.

"We're all of us too punctual," Valentine said; "let's tell the man to go on as far as the river. We have time."

"No, Mr. Barat, we won't. The car might break down, and then what would happen to Mr. Fahey's

dinner? I've too much respect for him — and it. We'll go straight to the restaurant and then if you like we'll sit down outside and you shall give us both a cocktail — yes, I *will* have one, Julie: you know I'm going to Carlsbad next month; let me have some amusement now — and we'll watch the people arrive." Mrs. Fenelon was in her own way indefatigable in seeking and enjoying amusement.

And truly her plan was worth while. When they arrived the large, almost noble, hall of the altered Pré-Catalan was lighted up, but the most of its guests were still to come. The great windows were thrown open to the air. Valentine and his party sat at a little table and called for dry Martinis and looked on one side at the darkening blue of the sky over Paris and on the other at the restaurant with its white cool walls and its thousand twinkling lights. Waiters ran to and fro; *chasseurs* fled hither and yon on swift feet; the doors of motor cars were swung open with a flourish and with an even greater flourish beautiful women and others who atoned for their lack of beauty by the exceeding picturesqueness of their appearance, were handed down by their cavaliers. Valentine was able to tell Mrs. Fenelon who many of the people were; some she knew and would bow to, others she knew by sight and disapprobation. Every language was spoken around them. For every claimant to the best table the *maître d'hôtel* had a soft answer. Never had a night been more beautiful, never had Valentine been happier.

"There's one thing they can't make in Paris and that's a cocktail, Julie." With this profound if unoriginal

remark Mrs. Fenelon broke into Valentine's dreams and, as he turned to talk to her, Martin Fahey arrived neither too soon nor too late. It was he who had the best table, he assured them.

Not suspense nor happiness spoiled Valentine's appetite that evening. Every one of his senses was alert, receptive of pleasure. Their table gave on the garden from which came in waves the warm smell of flowers. He looked at these beauties past Julie Fenelon. He could look at the one and the other. One side of her face, the side towards him, was cream and rose-pink in the light of the room; beyond it, over black trees splashed green by the light, the stars came out, singly it almost seemed, in the deepening sky. It was like something in a painter's dreamland, a Sidaner picture. And then he would turn to watch her little hands playing in and out on the table, and her little white teeth biting into white flesh. And she knew that he watched her and was glad.

But if Valentine wanted to watch and not to talk, his host wanted to talk and not to watch. It was a host's duty, too. They had reached the fish, a huge sole brought them in a silver dish, cold, embalmed in an amber jelly. It lay there whole, as if it were still alive.

"Now that's the dish of the house — one of the most difficult and most famous," he announced. "But they'll be able to do it twice as well next year, and if you'll come and dine with me here twelve months from to-day you'll see for yourselves."

"It's very good as it is," Miss Fenelon commented. "I don't see how it's to be improved."

"No, it could n't — that fish could n't. But think: are n't you being troubled by something as you eat it?"

"Nothing except these horrid little side bones, as far as I know."

"Ex-actly. That's what I mean. That's where I come in. I told Barat I was over here for the Foreign Office, but I'm not. I'm over here in the process of making my fortune. For the moment it's a secret, but I'll tell it to you."

"Fahey, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," Valentine broke in.

"Very well — you'll speak differently when you've heard. Now listen. The one drawback for the gourmet in eating sole is in these small side bones. The big one he can deal with, but the small ones, unless he has the soles filleted, which lessens the flavour, are always getting in the way, and playing the deuce with his pleasure. I am starting a company which is going to run a fish farm for the breeding of soles which have n't any of these side bones. Mrs. Fenelon, what your Luther Burbank has done for flowers and fruit, Martin Fahey is going to do for fish — for soles to begin with and then for other fish whose bones are inconvenient — red mullet, for instance. Really this is an historic occasion. The business is called the Fahey Boneless Sole Company — a misnomer, of course, since I don't want to deprive the poor beasts of their backbones and the others that stick out from it. No, Mrs. Fenelon, I know what you are going to say: you are so struck with the brilliance of the idea that you want to take shares in the business. I'm sorry: you can't. You shall have the first chance with the

subsidiary American company — we've already found a site on Long Island — when I've time to start it."

"You had better explain to us how you are going to interfere with the habits of nature," Valentine interposed, more to give his friend a moment to breathe than for any other reason.

"The easiest thing in the world, dear boy, once you've thought of it, and if you have patience. The same sort of thing has been done again and again with fruit and with other animals. Look at Burbank, for instance, and then think of pigeon and rabbit breeding. I've been working on this for years, let me tell you. I've got a little aquarium down in Cornwall where I've been breeding soles ever since I came down from Oxford — no, it's not a glass jar; it's a bit of the sea fenced off. I've already got so far that my soles have n't any side bones. But I'm not only going to do away with the bones; I'm also going to increase the animals' flavour. I'm going to have them be born and grow up in an atmosphere of calm where they won't have to struggle for existence and go always in fear of their lives. To do that destroys delicacy. Think of the lamb. You know Waggoners' Wells near Hindhead? Just below them I've bought a lot of ground and I'm going to dam up the stream, which is very pure and comes off sand, and have a huge new pond. That's where the boneless sole is going to be bred and reared."

"But it's fresh water, you ass." Valentine again.

"Of course; but that difficulty's soon overcome. You can either make the constituents — that's what you call 'em, is n't it? — of sea salt, or you can dry them

out of salt water. Either does for me, although the first way is cheaper and I shall adopt it. All the water as it flows into my pond will run across sieves of salt — and there you are."

"Well, it all sounds expensive. How are you going to make your fortune out of it?"

"By business ability and enterprise — in which last quality, by the way, some people are sadly lacking. In the first place I have placed my farm — as I call it — so near London that the soles can be picked out of the water in the early morning, passed through a lethal chamber (for there's to be no cruelty on my farm) and be on anybody's breakfast-table in London the same day. Anybody's table, did I say? No, that they won't be. The thing's a patent, and I'm not going to make the Fahey Boneless Sole too common. For some years the output will be strictly limited. It's all taken up, too. I have contracts with the Carlton in London — Kraemer simply jumped at it, Barat — and with the Ritz; and here in Paris with the Ritz, the Meurice, the Pré-Catalan and the Café de Paris. Between them they'll almost take up all the fish I care to supply. I'm just keeping back a hundred a day — and they'll go to one of the big London dealers. They're all after it, but I have n't decided which to give it to yet."

"Mr. Fahey, I call you a genius. I think it's a very good idea, don't you, Mamma? And we must have some shares in the Sub-sid-iary American Company, or whatever you call it."

"You shall, Miss Fenelon, as many as you like — but, good heavens! do you know what time it is? It's

half-past ten. It's too late to go anywhere now; what shall we do?"

"One other question, Fahey, before we talk about that. You're going to make a fortune, you say. What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm going to devote most of it to one of the most noble and useful objects — I'm going to start a school, a night school and a day school, a regular institution, for teaching punctuation to sign-painters. Believe me, it's the one crying want in the education of the present age. Why, walk along any —"

"Now, please stop," Valentine said. "Let some of your guests talk."

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH VALENTINE BARAT PROPOSES

MARTIN FAHEY had paid his considerable bill and once more it was a question of what should be done with the balance of the night. Certainly it was too late to go to a theatre or a music-hall. And at eleven o'clock Paris seems as dead to those who have not already a distraction as any other city — more so, indeed. She wakes up again later.

Fahey looked at Valentine — looked at him with intention. "Your car's waiting, Barat, you tell me. That'll be convenient. When we do go back you shall take me, too. What I suggest now is that we should walk a little in these Corotesque groves. Nobody ever does walk in this country, but it'll do us good and we shan't get robbed by *apaches* if we keep within reasonable distance of all this light. What do you say, Mrs. Fenelon? Will you walk with me, stroll rather? The ground's dry enough. Afterwards we can motor back to Paris."

Mrs. Fenelon was n't loth. She strolled off with Martin Fahey and left her daughter and Valentine sitting side by side. In the heavens now rode a sickle moon, and the air, he felt, was electric.

For minutes Valentine sat without saying a word. He was thinking, or else he was lost in dreams. Julie

Fenelon became impatient; she trifled with her chair. Valentine looked up:—

“Come, let us go out, too, Miss Fenelon. It won’t be too cold for you? It was rude of me to sit there saying nothing, but I was dreaming. I want to talk to you.” They were outside now in the half darkness pacing the gravel path. They had passed out of the radius of the restaurant noise and laughter. They were alone.

“Miss Fenelon, I want to tell you something you must know so well already and which again and again I have put off speaking to you of — no, let me finish, please do — put off, perhaps, because I was frightened, perhaps because I wanted to know something of what was to happen to my life before I asked you to share it. Julie, I love you. I have always loved you, cared for you more than anything else in the world — years ago, even before I had seen you. For you are the woman I used to dream of. We’ve been friends; you’ve given me the happiest hours of my life with your friendship. May we be lovers?”

Now, Julie Fenelon was of the stuff human girls are made of. She did love Valentine Barat. What he said thrilled her. Her whole being responded to the caress that was in his voice. But — well, she had the little touch of contrariety that is also no rare quality in her kind. She had been piqued. She had intended that Valentine’s declaration should come soon after she first knew him, and then she would have said “yes” without a second’s pause. But he had delayed, for no reason that could count with her; he had been prudent; he had seemed cold under her charm. And she had allowed her-

self in consequence almost to encourage another suitor. How did she stand with Everard Porton? Certainly she did n't love *him*. She loved Valentine Barat. That she knew. . . . But there was no need to capitulate on the moment. He should be punished for the trouble he had given her.

No hint, however, of these thoughts came with the words in which she answered him:—

"Valentine, I cannot tell you now whether I love you; indeed, I don't know. I like you — oh, so much. You know that, don't you? But I want you to let me think. Let us go on being friends for a while as we have been. Don't let there be any difference. I could n't stand that. Only one thing: you called me 'Julie'; I called you 'Valentine.' Let's do that always. Perhaps I shall be able to answer you soon. I want, Valentine, to be able to say 'yes.'" She finished, putting her hand on his arm as she did so, and hoping, wishing, that even now he would be less remote, less respectful, that he would brush aside the nonsense she had talked, that he would gather her up in his arms and crush her to him. . . .

But Valentine was not like that. For one moment he took the hand that lay on his sleeve and held, stooped down, indeed, to kiss, it. That was all.

"It shall be as you say, Julie. I will wait. I can. I shall see you while I wait. I shall be happy."

They turned and walked slowly back to the circle of light that marked the restaurant. Mrs. Fenelon and her companion were already waiting for them. Valentine could see that Martin Fahey searched his face for a sign

of success. It was Julie Fenelon who carried off the awkwardness of the moment: —

“Mamma dear, I’m quite ready if you want to start. And do you know I’ve just arranged something with Mr. Barat in which you’d better share. I think it’s silly that when he knows us so well he should go on calling me ‘Miss Fenelon’ and that I should go on saying ‘Mr. Barat.’ So in future I’m going to call him ‘Valentine’ and you are to do so, too — and he’s to call me ‘Julie.’”

Martin Fahey made a grimace to himself and went off to order the car. “I could have got a better result out of the evening than that myself, I do believe,” he said.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH MR. BARAT DEVELOPS DISTRUST OF THE NORMAL OPERATIONS OF THE FINANCIER AND HIS SON GOES TO THE WRONG STATION

To all intents and purposes the hoardings were down. The shell of Mr. Barat's Great Project neared completion. Not yet, of course, could the building be entered except by the privileged few, but the public could stand in Leicester Square or in Shaftesbury Avenue and form some idea of what it was to be. Still the towers — for there were to be more than one — were cloaked with scaffolding, their very height uncertain, but what a forest of scaffolding it was. People buzzed about it. It was one of the great wonders of London. It was to be finished and occupied by the following spring. Valentine had no longer any hesitation in visiting it. His own parallel work had passed the stage at which anything he could now see could influence him. Still he had before him many months of labour on the interior details — but he, too, would be ready by the spring.

Mr. Barat's own pleasure, almost his own interest, in his achievement seemed now a little to slacken. Perhaps it was because it was fast passing out of the region of promise; but it was more likely that now that his work was in a fair way toward completion it became more particularly the affair of Sir Edward Drakelow and his colleagues, the artist having to give place to the

financier, the man of business, the promoter. The first syndicate which had been formed to provide the funds or the credit with which Mr. Barat was enabled to give reality to his dreams must now proceed to shuffle off its burden on to the more generous shoulders of the public. It was a part of the scheme with which the architect could n't help showing he wished he had nothing to do.

And yet, even if he had been less reserved and had attempted to formulate and justify his dislike either to his son or to another, Mr. Barat would have found it very difficult. The building was there; it was as honest and as noble and as fine as his own talent or the hands of men could make it. It would house a many thousand souls. It had cost — oh, several millions. It was fitting that the men who had backed him with the weight of their confidence and their money should now get their reward, should also be relieved of the weight of completing the work. But on what terms? There was the rub. That was what stuck in Mr. Barat's gizzard, spoiled his nights, soured his pleasure in what he had done and had still to do, sent him to his work unrefreshed and brought him home weary and depressed.

The effect Valentine could see; it could not be overlooked; but he knew nothing of the reason. And, indeed, was there a reason, a sufficient reason? If his father had taken him into his confidence he would have answered quickly enough that there was surely reason for disquiet, suspicion, indeed, in any transaction in which Sir Edward Drakelow had a share. But that answer would have been prejudice pure and simple. Valentine

had never had any dealings with Sir Edward. He just distrusted him on his reputation — and on his face, that face that he had seen just once, at the Savoy. But then the kind of life that Valentine had led, and the kind of society he had cultivated, both made him no feeble judge of a man.

To return to Mr. Barat. He would argue with himself as to whether there was any excuse for his troubled mind. His associates had put up the money: that was clear enough. They'd risked a lot. They had built on their belief in his skill and in his vision. Now that his work was coming to a head they were proposing to carry through what had always been a part of their plan, a part of which they had made no secret. Naturally the greater share of the burden must be shifted. The public must be brought in. It not only sounded, but it surely was, all very right and proper. But the details were distressing, and the arrangements, the little managements of this interest and of that. Mr. Barat did n't like, for instance, the way in which the financial press was being considered. Some one had indiscreetly spoken in his presence of its being "worked." Surely his great achievement could stand on its own merits?

"Of course it can, Barat, of course it can," Sir Edward had answered; "but there's always a lot of enmity when a big thing is carried through. We must n't let any harm be done just for the lack of taking a little care." And he combed his long beard with his slim fingers, dissembling in some way the predatory, and increasing the benevolent, aspect of his face.

Mr. Barat's Great Project did, indeed, in its financial

aspect mean a pretty big and important flotation. Sir Edward Drakelow was, for some reason which he never properly explained, particularly anxious to interest the small investor, and as in these matters his will was that of the Board,— Lord Buttery and most of his colleagues being noble appendages,— everything was planned out with that object in view. A very bright spirit was brought in to write what Sir Edward called “the literary stuff” that was to introduce the actual advertisement of the prospectus.

Mr. Cowperthwayte Johnson, to give him his name, had been most things, and had in all of them been a curiously successful failure. But he could write. Give him his head and he would lead the public up to their ears in any morass. He could “write up” a pantomime or a new Health Exerciser, a New Religion or a patent food. The Great Project was nuts and wine to him. He revelled in it.

Naturally it fell to Mr. Barat’s lot to show Mr. Johnson over what was in process of completion in the Palace of Empire — a name, by the way, of which Mr. Barat disapproved but to which he had to assent in the absence of any ability to produce a better. Sir Edward Drakelow it was who had suggested it: he claimed it as his own original idea. In his cups Mr. Cowperthwayte Johnson swore it had sprung from his own brilliant brain, and that it was with it that he first effected his successful introduction to Sir Edward and his colleagues. Be that as it may the name caught on, and when Mr. Johnson found himself inside the building and began to realise its wonders he turned to Mr.

Barat and thanked God that England had such an architect and that a happy inspiration had enabled some one or other so aptly to name the work.

"Let me go home, Mr. Barat" — Mr. Barat had n't the slightest intention of keeping him for a minute longer than was necessary — he said after a while; "I've seen enough. What I have n't seen I can divine. It's prodigious, Sir; it's prodigious. I must get home to my desk."

And to do him justice Mr. Cowperthwayte Johnson knew his job, and did his work. He produced the material for a pamphlet that alone and even without illustrations would surely have fetched in all the required millions from its impressionable readers. It was fine; it was coherent; it truly explained; and, crowning touch of genius, it began with a quotation from Shelley: —

"Behold a gorgeous palace, that, amid
Yon populous city, rears its thousand towers
And seems itself a city."

It certainly carried Valentine off his feet, and the poetical introduction specially impressed him till his pleasure gave way to vexed amusement at finding whence the quotation had come.

"I am not at all sure Shelley's the man to begin a prospectus with," he said one day when he found himself in Mr. Cowperthwayte Johnson's society; "you know he is n't at all in the picture. But if you do quote him, why not quote a page or two of the context? A line like 'The grovelling hope of interest and gold' would help a lot with the sort of moneyed man you're looking for."

"I don't at all understand what you mean, young gentleman," Mr. Johnson answered. "But I'm always glad of ideas. Just write to me, won't you? If there's anything else that'd come in useful in Shelley, I'll be very glad. People like a touch of culture. Must n't give them too much of it, though."

Valentine forbore. He did not send Mr. Cowper-thwayte Johnson any more passages from Shelley. For one thing, he thought his father would n't like it.

Julie Fenelon had been as good as her word. She had allowed no difference to creep into her relations with Valentine. She showed, indeed, an even greater liking for his society; he came and went with added freedom; Mrs. Fenelon was more than ever an agreeable and complacent chaperon. Julie would sometimes meet him at the Gare du Nord, would sometimes see him off; she would dine with him alone. His position, indeed, was that of an accepted suitor in all but the title. And the affair took up a great deal more of his time than was convenient. Now and then he had an uncomfortable feeling that his father was beginning to view his constant and protracted week-end absences with growing disfavour. Mr. Barat had no reason to suspect that his son did his best to balance these recurring holidays by working double tides when he was not away.

Came a time when for a few days Mrs. Fenelon found herself under the necessity of going for a week to her friends in Brussels, and, as it was not convenient to take her daughter with her, Julie was left in Paris alone save for the company of her maid. Valentine had been

bidden to come over on the Friday and to take her to dinner and the play. "Don't come if you're too busy," she had added maliciously; "I'd like you to come, but I would n't be lonely if you did n't, as Mr. Porton has written to ask me to dine with him that night."

Some little jealousy of Everard Porton had grown up again in Valentine's brain. No, whatever happened he would go to Paris. He wrote that she was to expect him at half-past seven, and that she must be waiting for him in the hall, since they would not have more than time to dine and to get to the theatre. Each of the mornings of that week he worked till between four and five. His time was getting short now: it was essential that he should waste no moment that he could help.

"Valentine," Mr. Barat said on the Friday morning as they walked through Dean's Yard, "I should like you to lunch with me to-day. I've some one coming whom I wish you to meet."

Such an invitation came once in a blue moon, and when it came Valentine had considered it always as if it were a Command. But it was certain that he could n't go to-day. Indeed, he was only walking to Great George Street because his father liked it, because it was a habit, and because after all it enabled him at least to put in an appearance at the office before going off by the eleven-o'clock train. He kept silent for a moment and then:—

"I'm afraid, Sir, I can't very well come to-day. I have an engagement that makes it impossible, one I can't break."

Mr. Barat turned and looked at him:—

"If you are, as seems to be becoming more and more your habit, going to Paris, I shall be glad if you will make it convenient to go by the afternoon train." Mr. Barat had never shown so great a wish for his son's society, but then that son had never done otherwise than immediately accept his rare invitations.

"I am very sorry, Sir, but I can't do that. I *am* going to Paris and my engagement there is at half-past seven. I won't trouble you with its nature, but you'd be the first to say that I should not break it."

Mr. Barat said no more. Had Valentine been frank he would have understood. But unhappily he had been told nothing of his son's interest in Julie Fenelon, had, indeed, never heard her name. The thing was sheer misfortune. The invitation had been the fruit of something that had been said to him about his son's great knowledge of a certain side of the history of architecture. A man with whom Mr. Barat did business and who was, indeed, more than a little connected with the Great Project had expressed a wish to meet him. Mr. Barat had been surprised and pleased. Perhaps there was more in the boy than he had seen. He had then and there determined to do his best to find out. And now this new prompting had been nipped in the bud.

As for Valentine — well, his early morning was spoiled. He'd done a thing he'd never meant to do. He felt that he'd hurt his father, that he'd wounded the sensitive side of him. He sat and opened his letters automatically, wondering whether he might n't put things right even now by going in and making a clean breast of his position. . . .

Yes, he would! He got up and went to his father's room. It was empty.

"If it's Mr. Barat you're looking for, Mr. Valentine, he's just gone—he went off to the building with Fergusson three minutes ago," Mr. Wilson told him.

"Damnation!" Valentine answered; he had n't a chastened spirit. Now he might as well go to his train. Taking a couple of books and a few papers (for he kept clothes at the Normandy) he went out into the street and walking to the Abbey caught a Charing Cross omnibus. He was still very depressed.

The bearded ticket collector at Charing Cross knew Valentine and saluted him as he appeared. "Continental train, Sir! You've missed the ten-o'clock by forty-five minutes and I need n't tell you the eleven does n't go from here." Valentine swore for the second time that morning. Looking at the clock he saw that with luck he'd just get to Victoria in time. How could he have been such an ass! A hundred times he'd caught the eleven-o'clock at Victoria—but then two hundred times he'd gone to Paris by way of Charing Cross. Remembering that was n't much of a salve to his feelings . . . but surely he'd catch his train.

Running out of the station yard he jumped into a crawling taxi. "Victoria," he said; "and drive like hell. Double fare."

And certainly the chauffeur did his best. But Valentine had reckoned without allowing for the changing of the guard at St. James's Palace. There was the usual ten minutes to eleven stoppage of traffic. Almost

he got out and ran in the hope of finding a free taxi on the other side of the crowd . . . but just as his hand was on the door the block came to an end. His taxi moved again. Perhaps he'd still catch the train.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH HAVING MISSED HIS TRAIN VALENTINE BARAT CONCEIVES A PIECE OF FOLLY

VALENTINE missed the train by just the number of seconds that it took him to run from his taxi to the platform.

"Stand aside, there, stand aside," some one called out quite unnecessarily: you can't catch a train when it's gone.

"Well, that's done it," he said; "and all through my own damned carelessness — like so many things that happen to me. And now the only thing left is for me to go and telegraph to Julie, to concoct something that'll make her realise that it was n't my fault exactly and that I'm a deal sorrier than she is. I can be with her by a quarter to ten anyhow." And he turned to walk down the platform to the telegraph office.

Had he waited even one second longer, he would not have avoided noticing his rival. Porton had been speeding a friend, having postponed his own visit to Paris when he heard that Julie Fenelon would n't or could n't dine with him. Seeing Valentine and realising what had happened, he realised also why Miss Fenelon had not been free to accept his invitation. Could n't he turn the accident somehow to his own advantage? He watched Valentine walk towards the telegraph office and then saw him pause and turn to go out of the station. Well, he'd chance it and send a telegram himself: —

Miss Julie Fenelon Hotel France et Wellington Paris.

As I have just seen Mr. Barat miss his train I take it you will be free after all to-night. Anyhow on chance shall call for you before 9.45.

EVERARD PORTON.

There was some method in his otherwise odd behaviour. It was pretty certain that Barat would go by the next train, but Porton knew well that Julie Fenelon's eager, impatient temper would n't cheerfully put up with her disappointment. Likely as not she'd visit Valentine's carelessness upon him by refusing to go out at all. He'd heard her gird against the habit of catching trains by the skin of one's teeth. Anyhow it was worth chancing. He'd make certain of getting to the hotel before Barat by securing a compartment to himself and changing on the train between Boulogne and Paris. "And then he'll arrive and find the bird flown." Porton smiled unpleasantly.

As for Valentine, his own action in sheering off from the telegraph office was dictated by exactly the same considerations which had influeneed his rival. He knew — no one better — how angry Julie would be. Only a week or two before he'd infuriated her by arriving at the Gare du Nord for the nine-fifteen to London with so little time to spare that he had hardly time to bid her good-bye before mounting the already moving carriage. "You'll miss the train coming to Paris one day, Valentine," she'd said. "If you do and I'm waiting for you, you'd better not come. I hate that kind of thing."

The whole business irritated him horribly. Here he had added to his estrangement from his father, wounded him, refused his rare hospitality — and all for nothing. He'd said he could n't wait for the two-twenty train and here he was waiting for it. He'd angered his father and, of a certainty, he'd do more than anger Julie. She'd be put out at missing the play, at having her evening spoiled. Perhaps in his own discomfiture of spirit he exaggerated.

But having missed the train it behoved him to put as good a face on it as he could. That was why he had n't sent a telegram — yet. There was time. If one telegraphed in a hurry one was as likely as not to put one's foot in it. He'd walk across the Park to the office at the bottom of St. James's Street and in that way he'd have time to think out the best means of expressing his contrition and his disappointment. . . .

Valentine did n't turn to the left, however, when he had passed through Stable Yard. One might have thought he'd forgotten all about the telegram. He'd quickened his pace and walked eastward along the south side of Pall Mall, and then suddenly he quickened it again, almost breaking into a run as he came within hail of the entrance of the Automobile Club. "What luck!" he said to himself; "there's the very man — and to think it was two to one against my finding him in town even."

"Hi, Tony, I want you" — he had caught his friend in the very act of stepping into a taxi — "here, I'll get in with you. Where do you think you're going?"

"Me? Oh, I was thinking of going down to the Cecil

to see one of those French flying fellows who's stopping there."

"Well, I'm very sorry, Tony, but your French friend will have to wait. I want you, want you badly. You shall hear all about it directly, but let's get going first; there's precious little time to spare. Now don't get excited —"

"No, I won't get excited, but I don't see why we should n't start this man for somewhere or other. The beastly machine is ticking up tuppence a minute. Where do *you* want to go?"

"All in good time; I'll pay. First, where do you keep your flying kit or whatever you call the clothes you wear when you go up?"

"Oh, one suit in my rooms and one down at Hendon. But why?"

Valentine leaned out of the taxi window and told the man to hurry to 115B Jermyn Street.

"What the devil are you driving at, Barat?"

"Where the devil am I driving to, is more the question, Tony. But wait and I'll tell you. Do be calm, though. The worst of you aeronautical beggars is that you are so jolly nervous and excitable. One thing at a time. We're going to call at Jermyn Street and get that suit to begin with."

Tony Bickerton had many qualities. Valentine was making the most of his knowledge of them. In the first place, he was extraordinarily good-natured, would do anything for anybody who had the slightest claim on him as long as he was approached in the right way. In the second, he was pig-headed: once get an idea

into his head, once start him on a settled course of action, and you had to tie him down before you could prevent him carrying it out. In the third, having lots of money and nothing much to do with it, he'd taken up flying with some enthusiasm. Indeed, he'd gained some distinction at the sport — then more or less in its infancy: Monsieur Bleriot's first flight of the Channel was not such a long-ago achievement — and would have gained more if he had n't been so lazy.

They'd arrived at the Jermyn Street rooms and Valentine followed his friend upstairs. "Please hurry," he said, "and while you and your man are seeing that nothing's forgotten, I'll get you Hendon on the telephone."

The connection took a little time to achieve and while he was waiting Valentine watched his friend collect a curious and miscellaneous heap of strange garments and accessories. Bickerton looked up after a minute or two: —

"Perhaps you won't mind telling me why the devil you're getting Hendon on the telephone for me?"

"Because you want Hendon, my dear friend. Now look here, you've once or twice asked me to go up with you and I've answered you quite frankly that I'd wait till it was safe. Well, it's quite safe to-day — there is n't a breath of air stirring — and I want you to take me up —"

"When you say there is n't a breath of air stirring it shows how jolly little you know about it. As a matter of fact I was thinking of flying to Norwich to-day, but they told me early that all the indications were

of wind up above, and that it'll come down directly. So I put it off. That's why you catch me at a loose end and able to listen to you."

"You mean to tell me it is n't safe to go up to-day?"

"Oh, yes, it's safe enough to go up in the way you mean — a mile or two round and round. There'd only be a risk if it was a question of cross-country flying."

Valentine set his teeth. He also had his share of stubbornness. He'd started and he'd have to go on. He was n't used to the idea of turning back.

"My dear Tony, I want you to take me up and I want you to take me across country — not a little way, but a long way. It's an important matter to me. I leave the question of whether it's safe to you. I don't want to have the bills announcing to-night 'Famous Aeronaut and Passenger killed.' But short of the like-lihood of that I don't care. It's a long way. That's why I was asking about your suit. I'll wear the one down at Hendon. If you ought to put on thick clothing, do — only for God's sake hurry, like a good chap — ah, there's the telephone. Now you speak to 'em. Tell 'em to get your machine ready and that it's to be loaded up to the gunwale with petrol or whatever it is you use. Seriously, tell 'em to put in as much as it will carry."

Bickerton took his instructions literally. Valentine felt that he was going to have his own way. He had feared that if he'd gone more directly to work he'd have failed. Even now he was proceeding circumspectly.

"Barat, I'm going to change: I can't go like this. You ought to change, too."

"No time for me, Tony. I can't spare a minute

except for actual essentials. You change and I'll go down and see if that taxi can take us to Hendon and if it's likely to be quick."

The chauffeur assured Valentine that he could take them down to the flying ground in a brace of shakes. Going back to his friend he found him almost ready. He'd been thinking as well as changing.

"Look here, Barat, I'll do anything in reason for you. As for taking risks, I've taken enough to be able to take another. The weather is n't ideal—and, damn it, man, you don't even tell me where we're going — but still I'm game. But where *are* we going?"

"I'll tell you on the way down — I'd tell you now if I was n't afraid you'd cry off. Really I ought n't to say a word until we're up in 'the air, but then you would n't have your maps. I won't say I'm not nervous of going up, but I can tell you I'm in a deadly funk for fear you'll cry off at the last moment."

He spoke so seriously that Bickerton realised that it was some matter of moment, that whatever it was Barat's heart was in it. He was ready now, and he'd thrown off all hesitation.

"Unless it's absolutely suicidal, I'll do what you want, Barat. So cheer up, old top, and come along. Here, help me with some of this gear."

In another moment they were on the way to Hendon, and Valentine had time to think of what he was doing. Certainly he was doing a very silly thing. But then he'd hate like fury, he told himself, to disappoint Julie. He fancied he could see her face if he did n't turn up. "Poor darling," he said; "it's been done before and I don't

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH JULIE FENELON WAKES UP, AND IS
FILLED WITH THE VANITY OF LIFE

PARTICULARLY now that her mother was away Julie Fenelon took things easily. Having no one but herself to consider it was her habit to sleep just as long as she listed. It was so pleasant to wake up uncalled, to stretch her long body between the cool sheets, to look at the sun creeping round the edges of the curtain and to hear the dull murmur of the street traffic. On this day that she was expecting her lover she woke up later than usual. She had so looked forward to that day. They would have a jolly evening and a happy week-end. She and Valentine never quarrelled, scarcely differed indeed. He was a dear. Perhaps it was time that she accepted him. Perhaps it was n't fair to keep him uncertain when she herself knew her own mind so well.

"Marianne . . . Marianne. Give me my chocolate please. I'm awake and very hungry."

The good Norman Marianne, who sat most of the day sewing in the little ante-chamber, bustled in and drew back the curtains. Sun flooded the room.

"Bien, bien, ma petite. The chocolate will be ready at once. Ah, and you look well this morning, Mademoiselle."

"Do I, Marianne? Hurrah! But quick. Give me the glass. Let me look at myself."

Julie sat up in bed and brushed the wandering hair from her eyes. Yes, Marianne was right: she did look her best. "And, oh, I feel so happy, Marianne — I shall sing directly. I wish we had a garden here so I could run about just as I am in this sun."

"You'd tread on your nightdress if you did, ma petite, and that'd mean more work for Marianne. Be patient: the chocolate comes. And of course you are happy. To-night Monsieur Valentine arrives, n'est-ce-pas? And then you will be out all the time and your poor Marianne will hardly have you for a moment to herself. Ah, but he is gentil, your Monsieur Valentine, Mademoiselle. No wonder he makes you happy. He has such a kind face. Now there, Mademoiselle, there is the chocolate and the toast — just as you like them. Where shall I put the tray? There. Very well — but don't move or it'll all fall over."

Julie ate and sang — an old French love song — and then ate again, and read her letters and glanced at the Paris "Daily Mail" and talked to Marianne about what she should wear. "What is the time? Ah, nearly twelve o'clock. I shall get up directly, Marianne. Prepare my bath. And then I shall go down and lunch all by myself in the stupid old restaurant — but I shan't eat anything or I shall have no appetite left for to-night and then Monsieur Barat will be angry. I don't want that to happen because I'm going to be so happy to-night — and then I'm going to squeeze all the happiness there is out of the next two days. After lunch, Marianne, you and I will take a taxi and go out to the Bois and sit in a quiet part, and you shall sew and I'll read. But

we must be back in plenty of time for me to dress. Remember I have to be ready and downstairs a minute before half-past seven. Monsieur Barat said so."

"You shall, you shall, ma petite. And now I will make the bath for you. First though I will take the tray and all these papers."

Left alone, Julie Fenelon turned on her side, put the palms of her hands together, put them under her cheek, snuggled up in her bed with her knees under her chin, closed her eyes and began to think. How different it would all be when she was married. Would it be as good? Of course it would — with Valentine. And he was to be with her to-night, and she'd be so proud of his straight, clean look. They would have such a good time; and when on Sunday night he went back he should take her promise back with him. . . .

"Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, the bath is ready. It is just as Mademoiselle likes it . . . but hold, Mademoiselle, for a little moment. One knocks, I think." Marianne went through to the salon door. "Yes, a telegram for Mademoiselle." Julie Fenelon heard her tell the *chasseur* to wait before she came bustling in with the little oblong of blue paper. She took it from the maid's hand without any particular interest. "Perhaps from mamma, or perhaps an invitation to lunch — well, I shan't lunch." She opened it carelessly.

"As I have just seen Mr. Barat miss his train . . ."

Julie Fenelon let the paper fall on to the bedclothes. "Tell the boy there's no answer, Marianne," she said in a dry voice. "And, Marianne, don't put any dress

out for me. I have a headache. I shall just take my bath and then come back to bed again. And I shan't go out to-night."

"But Mademoiselle — Monsieur Barat, what will he say? He has come on purpose for Mademoiselle surely. He will be so sad."

"Mr. Barat is not coming, Marianne. And now go away — stop, though: while I'm in my bath pull my curtains together again. I don't want the light. And then don't disturb me till I call you. I shall want no lunch."

Julie Fenelon took her disappointments badly. She had, for many small reasons, set such store on her plan for this evening and now it was all to go by the board. And why? Because the man who said he loved her would n't even take the trouble to catch the train. Very well. No doubt he would catch the next — but she would n't see him — not till to-morrow anyhow. Then she remembered that Everard Porton would come for her. Perhaps she would go out with him. At least they could dine late and see a couple of acts of something she'd seen already. It would anger Valentine to find that she had gone out. That would be to the good, anyhow. But there was no need to decide yet. It never occurred to her to wonder why he had n't telegraphed himself. She just knew he'd missed his train and that he would n't arrive. That was enough. And she'd only that morning decided to tell him that she did love him. And he cared for her too little even to catch his train! Perhaps that he cared so little now was her fault — partly her fault. She should n't have kept him waiting. The tears began to roll down her cheeks. . . .

When a couple of hours later Marianne tiptoed into the room she found her young mistress asleep. "Poor lamb: if she's unhappy it'll do her good to have her sleep out," she said, and tiptoed out again.

Julie Fenelon slept a little on and off, was miserable all the time sleeping and waking, jumped up and found a book and tried to read it in bed, failed and slept again. She heard most of the hours strike, and at six she determined that when Everard Porton came he should find her ready, and that he should n't see how great a disappointment she'd had, and to-morrow she would n't meet Valentine till after lunch — and then she would n't forgive him.

And now Julie Fenelon began to feel hungry and to be very sorry for herself. She had a true headache. Her pillow was no longer a comfort. Why did n't Marianne bring her some tea? Why was she left all alone? But the hour passed and no Marianne appeared. Perhaps she slept a little again. She was awakened if she did sleep by the soft opening of the door that led from the salon into Marianne's little workroom, and then the maid herself appeared. "It is almost half-past seven, ma petite, and I have ordered a little consommé and the wing of a chicken for Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle must eat them if only to please her Marianne."

Julie Fenelon heard of the food with joy. "I want nothing to eat, Marianne, but I will take it to please you as you say. Give me my glass again — no, the big one, stupid — and I'll do my hair a little. I will eat what you've ordered and then I will go to sleep again. I had thought of going out to a late dinner at half-past

nine, but I 've changed my mind." She was as angry as ever with Valentine, but she was too tired and had too little spirit, she thought, to go out with his rival. And after all it had n't been so very nice of him to telegraph like that. She sat up in bed and unbraided her hair, and Marianne watched her and lamented that the plan for the evening had fallen through. "Never, never have I seen Mademoiselle look so well. What a pity! what a pity!"

As a matter of fact Julie Fenelon's eyes sparkled and her cheeks were flushed more at the thought of something to eat than anything else, sorry for herself though she still was. She waited for the waiter's knock with avidity and when it came called out: "Quick, quick, Marianne, bring in the tray"; and then, as an after-thought: "if I must eat, let me get it over."

Carefully, gingerly, the tray was arranged on the bed at her side; she had lifted the lid of the bowl in which the consommé floated, steaming and delicious in its fragrance, when there came another knock at the door. Julie Fenelon paused in the very act of lifting the first spoonful to her lips, in curiosity as to what other business could be forward. It was a *chasseur*, she fancied, but she could hear no more than the murmur of his voice.

Marianne appeared. "Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle — Monsieur Barat is en bas; he awaits Mademoiselle."

Her mistress caught her breath — but she knew better. "Tell him he makes a mistake. These boys get a name once and they give it to every fresh visitor. Find out who it is, Marianne."

Marianne came back. "Mademoiselle, it *is*, it must be, Monsieur Barat. It is Joseph who is here and he knows Monsieur Barat well. He is sure."

Julie Fenelon was convinced now. There had been some mistake about his missing his train. That odious Mr. Porton! Oh—and she was n't ready! "Run down, Marianne, quickly and tell Mr. Barat I shall only keep him waiting a short time. No, no: stop. Give me my clothes first. . . . Now, go. Tell him I am so sorry—but, Marianne, don't say I thought he was n't coming. And take this tray. Hurry now, Marianne!"

Julie Fenelon leapt out of bed.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN WHICH TONY BICKERTON PROVES AS GOOD AS HIS WORD AND VALENTINE ARRIVES

CONTACT!" Valentine heard Bickerton's cry, and then for a while all was confusion. He had meant to keep his head and to observe everything both before and after the start, but somehow or other the issues were too great. The whole thing was too serious, too novel. Perhaps it would have been different if he had gone up for the first time on a mere exhibition flight — although even those were not then taken so much as a matter of course as they came to be later. But here he found himself, on a day which his pilot described as not without danger, starting out to cross the Channel and to get as far as Paris with the necessity of wasting not a single moment. They could neither afford to go astray, even a little astray, nor to consume minutes in any unnecessary descents. This journey had been successfully taken with a passenger — once; but then that was under conditions far other than those he'd forced on his friend. Then everything had been thought out, he supposed, and prepared for; now the only special preparation was — why, there was n't any. All he could remember was that he'd begged Bickerton to see that his petrol tanks were full.

These thoughts emerged slowly from a welter of emotion. His fear, he found, had left him. What was

to be was to be. Bickerton was as good as any other English aeronaut, he believed. Surely, even to please his friend, he would n't have started out on an errand absolutely foolhardy. True he'd been rushed into it, hurried into it intentionally so that he'd have no time for real consideration — but down below they knew what he'd set off to achieve, and the officials or mechanics or whatever they were would have stopped him if the risk had been too great. And now they were in the air. Gradually Valentine collected his mental bearings and began to look about him. His pilot he could n't see, but all around seemed to be stays and wires. He was strapped into his seat, and that to begin with worried him, gave him a sense of insecurity, suggesting that it would be the simplest thing in the world to overbalance, straps or no straps, and fall headlong. The seat reminded him of nothing so much as those ridiculous little perches that command the large mowing-machines he'd played round as a child; certainly it was no more commodious or secure. And his clothes irked him, and the thick veil which protected his eyes and face from the scattering oil made his sight unhappy. To begin with, as one does when one finds one's self on a horse for the first time, all his inclination was to hold on with his hands to the struts on either side of him, and he did so. But it came to seem unnecessary. The motion of the machine was so easy, so level.

For several minutes he either avoided the temptation to look down at the earth or else he had n't the courage — he was n't sure which. He wondered whether they were flying high, and then he looked. . . . And

that was England beneath him, that curious grey-green mass on which nothing seemed to stand out clearly, nothing seemed to him easy to identify. Certainly he could make out no one place which he recognised. But they seemed to be going so slowly. How far, he wondered, had they already come? How long had he been in the air? could he get at his watch to see? But perhaps he mustn't alter the poise of his body even to that extent. Slowly he raised his arm to his chest and pushed it into the flap of his coat, fearful of the effect of the slightest movement, so ignorant was he of what he might or might not do on this frail structure. Then he paused. He'd omitted to find out whether while they were flying he'd be able to talk to his pilot. He'd try: —

“Tony, can I look at my watch?”

The words, shouted though they were, vanished almost before they could leave his mouth. They flew behind him.

Bickerton made no sign. Valentine realised that the crackling roar of the engine killed all possibility of speech. He fell back again on an attempt to get at his watch. Nothing untoward happened. At length it was in his hand. The hour was one minute to two. They had started, he knew, just before a quarter past one.

And he had thought they had been in the air no more than five minutes. He knew now why he had seen no sign, not even the smoke, of London.

He wondered whether now that he knew the time the hours would pass quickly or slowly — slowly he feared. He closed his eyes and wrapt himself in thought. Words of Shelley's came into his mind: —

"The magic car moved on," —

but then that was a passage by night. He opened his eyes: —

"Far, far below the chariot's path,
Calm as a slumbering babe
Tremendous Ocean lay.
. . . The chariot's way
Lay through the midst of an immense concave."

Suddenly he saw that they were over the Channel and approaching what he knew was Cap Grisnez, insignificant though it looked from this height. . . . They were above land again now; he tried to get some idea of their speed from the passage of definite objects in the green sun-swathed obscurity below. But Boulogne with its driven smoke appeared to the right and was the only landmark he could pick up. It gave him no help. The plane seemed to be moving so slowly that he thought it could barely be holding its own against what he took to be a terrific head-wind. Not till he looked directly beneath him again and saw clumps of trees and buildings drifting past was he reassured as to their making any real progress at all. Flying seemed so tedious. In this way surely they might go on to Berlin. And to think that in the early morning Bickerton had feared to fly even to Norwich! Why, they must have done more than that distance already. . . .

Good God! What had happened? Valentine knew that all was over. Suddenly the machine was falling — just falling, plumb, like a stone. . . . The earth was rushing up to meet them. . . . And it was for this he had missed his train. And Julie would never know

that his coming to her by aeroplane was anything else but a piece of mere bravado, a boyish folly. . . . He had had that difference with his father, too. He'd never see his father's work complete, his father would never see his plans. . . . All his hopes were at an end. In a moment he would be dead, and broken. . . . He closed his eyes, and waited. . . .

An eternity of time seemed to pass, and then suddenly he felt that the earthward rush was arrested. Something had struck the planes from below. Every wire in the machine vibrated, thrummed, like a taut fiddle-string. Instinctively he knew that the immediate danger was at an end and that they were on an even keel. They were flying again as before.

His eyes opened now, and he instinctively looked down. No longer was the ground coming towards them; it was passing away beneath them. He felt, he could n't see, that his pilot was in command again. They were soaring upward, going higher than ever surely. For a moment now he felt sick. He lifted his hand and brushed the sweat from round his mouth.

The sense of tedium had left him. Something he knew had gone wrong. It might go wrong again. All confidence in his pilot, in the machine, in the air, had vanished. . . . But now they would see Paris soon. If they yet fell and he was not killed outright and they were near enough, should he send for Julie to tell her before he died that he had done this for her?

He sat as in a stupor, his mind a blank; and then suddenly he saw something shining white in the setting sun. Soon he knew that it was the Sacré Cœur. Then

he made out the Eiffel Tower. They were practically there.

Valentine's eyes were glued on the Paris he knew so well. How would they descend? As the question passed through his mind the machine seemed to heel over at a terrible angle, and she swept round in a great spiral. The roar of the engine slackened. Was this the *vol plané* of which he had read? The engine stopped. The nose of the machine turned to the earth. Valentine could see at what Bickerton was aiming — a green field — but would they hit it? Terror seized him once more. He knew that they were falling faster and faster. Surely the descent was the most dangerous part. Now buildings sprang up; he could see that they were hangars for the machines. The nose of the aeroplane lifted . . .

They were on the ground again.

Warned of their possible arrival, French operatives had been ready to receive them. Bickerton paused a minute before descending from his seat. He bent over and touched Valentine on the shoulder. "My dear Barat, that was as close a touch as I ever had in my life. Another couple of seconds and we should have been dead — and flat."

Valentine, now that he felt on firm earth, was braver. A danger that was past was no danger to him. "Why, what was it? What did happen?"

"A pocket — that's all. We got through it just in time. But I gave myself up for lost, I can tell you. I knew I'd flown for the last time. As it is, I suppose I'll have to take the machine back. When will you be ready?"

"I shan't be ready, Tony, thanks all the same. I've had my fill of flying. I don't think I'll ever go up again. But, my dear fellow, you've done what I wanted: it's exactly half-past six. If I can find a taxi I shall do better than if I'd come by the train I missed. Can you come into Paris with me?"

"No, I can't, old top. I must stop behind and look after the old 'bus. I'll see you in the morning, I dare say."

It was n't until he was driving into Paris that Valentine realised that he'd not thanked his friend.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN WHICH VALENTINE IS TOO WORN OUT TO BE AS HAPPY AS HE OUGHT TO BE

JULIE FENELON did not look as if she had almost fallen into her clothes. Marianne had served her well: not a fold was out of place, and not even a curl of her pretty hair strayed unhappily.

"Valentine, I have n't the shadow of an excuse: I've kept you waiting; we shall have to hurry through dinner or else be late for the theatre, and it's all my fault, paragon of punctuality that I set myself up to be!"

Valentine's nerves were still quivering, but he did n't show it.

"No, don't fret. We shall be in lots of time. French theatres always begin late; you know that. And besides, we're going to dine next door — at Marguery's — and I sent a *chasseur* to order the dinner. It'll be short. I thought that for once in a way, and if we choose a quiet place, we could make up afterwards at supper. But come along: here's the taxi."

Miss Fenelon's heart was in the same state as her lover's nerves, but she was all calculation. As she had dressed she had paid ample penance for her causeless anger against him. He should know her decision that very night; he should be sure of her love; there should be no more hesitation. But then she wondered how it

could be brought about: surely after her folly they'd have to rush through their meal. And there would be little opportunity for protracted sentiment either going, coming, or in the Gymnase itself. She had thought of supper only to dismiss the idea. Mrs. Fenelon did n't forbid, but she discouraged, and it was the rarest treat. Still, as Valentine had suggested it. . . . There would be her chance. Poor dear, he deserved to know.

Dinner had been eaten and the play had been seen, and at last they were seated side by side near the rue Royale window of Durand's. Now Julie Fenelon felt in no hurry. She turned to look at her lover, not so much to assure herself, but to let herself see once more that he was the cleanest, straightest, nicest-looking man she knew.

"Valentine, I've never seen you look so well; but you're so pink! Your face looks a little as if you'd been boiled. What *have* you been doing to yourself?"

Valentine knew, but he saw no reason for telling. He did n't indeed propose to say a word about his flight. He was a little ashamed of his own foolhardiness, for one thing, and a good deal ashamed at having missed the train. He'd been astonished at his own pink aspect when at last he'd reached his hotel. It had been the wind, of course. Now he passed off Julie Fenelon's inquiry with some remark about the sun, and fell to the ordering of the supper, which, thank Heaven, they were to enjoy undistracted by the gyrations of inferior Spanish dancers or perspiring and raucous Negro minstrels. He must, by the way, have been almost alone in

his simple taste, for Durand's is no more, and nowadays you can hardly sup in Paris without uproar.

"It's nearly half-past twelve," Julie Fenelon announced as the waiter brought their *consommé madrilène*. "I'm going to sit here talking to you till five minutes to two — you'll understand why directly — and that means I shall be home at two and in bed at half-past and that I shall have eight hours' sleep before you come to fetch me at half-past eleven to-morrow. I've got all sorts of plans for to-morrow."

Valentine neglected his food to watch her. If only he could make sure of his happiness to-night! . . . but he would n't try. She'd told him to wait, and he would — till his father's building was finished and till his father had realised the son he was, knew that he was n't all unworthy. He felt so happy, and oh! so tired; and his fatigue made him sentimental.

Why her companion was so distract Miss Fenelon had no idea, but she had nerves which told her more than she knew. She did nothing to divert Valentine from his mood till the waiter had cleared the table and had left before them the little cups of black coffee. Then she looked at him.

"Valentine. Look at me. Listen, dear. I want to tell you something. I'm sorry I told you to wait. I was n't telling you the truth when I said I did n't know if I loved you. I do love you. And I did. I only love you in the world I almost feel. I could n't do without you. And I'm so, so happy."

She took his big hand between her two small ones and squeezed it for a second. Such pretty scenes are not out of the way in Paris.

"And now, dear, we must go; it's the time I said."

Valentine, who was hardly sure that he was on the earth, answered her never a word.

When Marianne brought her mistress her chocolate and her "Daily Mail" at half-past ten the next morning the first thing that Julie Fenelon read was a long description of her lover's flight. Tony Bickerton had not been reticent.



BOOK II

"And indeed a character that does not wait for circumstances to shape it, is of small worth in the race that must be run. To be set too early, is to take the work out of the hands of the Sculptor who fashions men."

EVAN HARRINGTON.

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH VALENTINE FINISHES HIS WORK, WRITES TO HIS FATHER, AND RELAPSES

IT would have been useless for Valentine Barat to pretend that he found it easy to settle down into his stride when he returned from Paris the richer for the knowledge that Julie Fenelon's heart was in his keeping. He could tell nobody except Fahey — and Fahey was not altogether a satisfactory confidant. He wished he could have told his father.

But Mr. Barat had a great many other things to claim his attention. Months passed and found him busier and busier. All the hoardings in Leicester Square and Shaftesbury Avenue, save just a barrier to keep out the trespasser, were down now. Here and there the lines of his Palace were obscured, made uncertain, by the scaffolding rendered necessary by the last work of painters and decorators, but in effect the building was open to the world. Its wonders transcended the imagination of any of the scribes who had been busy at its inception with their prophecies and their suggestions. Mr. Cowperthwayte Johnson's ingenuity in quoting "Queen Mab" was justified, indeed. Nothing now remained but to fill the shell with life. That fortunately was not Mr. Barat's job, but it was clear enough that success was assured. The flotation of the company that was to control the undertaking had gone through

gorgeously; queues had filed up outside the banks which had the issue in hand; shares were quoted at a considerable premium before even the allotment was made.

And then, as the last touch, Lord Butterby announced to his Board that he'd that morning heard that the King had consented to "open" the Palace of Empire. Such a recognition was not unsuitable. Mr. Barat's work seemed worthy of all the honour his fellow-citizens could give it. But his own pleasure reached its zenith on the day that the last of the contractor's workmen left the building. Nor king nor any future honour nor success could increase his satisfaction. His was the architect's pride.

For Valentine it had been a winter happy and unhappy. He had had to work too hard; his visits to Paris had become even more frequent and had eaten up time; his father seemed more and more to take his absences for granted and to resent them. On the other hand, he had Julie's love, and even though Mrs. Fenelon had not yet been asked to smile on their engagement he had no fear of difficulties from that placid quarter. And now at the beginning of March spring was in the air. London was quickening with its approach. The streets were more crowded. The sun shone occasionally. March, half-spent, prepared a smiling welcome to April. But since the turn of the year a shadow had darkened Valentine's spirits — the shadow of Mr. R. Leverton Fordyce, the first of whose bills had to be met on the 24th of March. How it could be contrived Valentine had little idea. When he had, eight

months before, carried off the six hundred pounds from the discreet office of that gentlemanly financier he had determined that, once his pressing liabilities were out of the way, he would be able to save from his income enough money for this first call. Things hadn't happened like that. Other of his tradesmen had refused to wait any longer and had had to be settled with; those tickets to Paris, those dinners, those suppers and those drives to Versailles, Saint-Cloud, Saint-Germain, had taken what was left. Valentine was an easy spender.

The next week was charged with importance in another way. On 19th March, a Saturday, the Palace of Empire was to be "opened" by the King. Already many of its tenants had taken up their quarters; the flats were all occupied, and some of the offices were hives of useful activity. Not, however, till after its more grandiose and public halls had been dedicated by royal hands to the common good would its wonders be thrown open. On Monday, 21st March, the whole place should be humming — market-place, club, theatre, gymnasium, hotel: it had been arranged that they should be all ready together. The opening of the Palace of Empire was to be, was already, indeed, a triumph of organisation.

It was in this fact that Valentine, groping darkly in the future for assistance, hoped for his one possible salvation.

Valentine saw things in this way: as far as his architectural work was concerned, Mr. Barat had now finished with the Leicester Square building. True, his days were active. People would insist on thinking this

silent man the mainspring of the enterprise. It was with his personality that the journalists played when, day after day, in column after column, they went again and again over the tale of wonders which had been prepared for London's glory. He had for the present to be at every one's beck and call. Lord Buttery was n't much good anyway, and Sir Edward Drakelow knew better than to suppose that his little title and not too popular reputation could offset the hold that Mr. Barat's achievement had gained in the public mind. So Valentine's father, having conceived and having created, had now to bear the brunt of the more harassing if less responsible work of talking, of explaining, of seeing in fact that his ideas were realised in every possible small detail. But once the official "opening" was a thing of the past he would be free of all these embarrassments. He would, Valentine reckoned, have time on his hands. And it was in the week-end following the ceremony that Valentine hoped to justify his life to his father, to show him the plans, his proof that he could work, that he had energy, even that he had ability. He would tell him everything, of his disappointments in the past, of his wish to serve, of Julie — and then he would tell him, if things seemed to go well, as they surely should, of his difficulties about money. His father would help him; all his debts would be paid; a new life of affection and friendship would open for both of them; later, no doubt, he would get a partnership — and then his future would be clear.

So Valentine reasoned. Not always was he hopeful. He knew that he would hate like fury the actual con-

fessing of his money difficulties. After all, was he sure that he understood his father's character sufficiently well to justify his optimism as to the result? He could only hope. Was there any other way? He could think of none. Mr. Fordyce had so definitely spoken of the necessity of the first of the bills being met. A few hundreds. It was n't such an enormous sum, after all. . . . Often on a Monday morning in the past he'd had to receive more than that from his bookmaker. Those days, though, were over. Why, he hardly knew the name of the winter favourite for the Derby. And this was the eve of the opening of the flat-racing season! To-day was Saturday; the Lincolnshire Handicap was to be run on Tuesday. What was running? He wondered.

Random thoughts of this kind had assailed him before, only to pass out of his mind, but it happened to-day that he was on his way to his club to glance through the week's reviews, and that there came to the room in which he ensconced himself three young men, one of whom he knew and nodded to, who insisted, as they drank their whiskey-and-sodas, on talking about their affairs in so loud a tone that it was impossible to escape hearing everything that was said. They fell to discussing the next week's racing: —

"I tell you, Jerry M. will win. He's got a fair chance on form. You can't deny that. As a matter of fact, he only has to escape accident. He's a racing certainty. And the stable are confident — that's really what I go on. You know, Elliott, that they've always told me when they've had a good thing. The point is that with

Jerry M., bar accident, one can help one's self. They made no secret of that."

It was Valentine's friend who was doing the talking and Valentine knew him for a very knowledgeable young man who was n't in the habit of being over-confident. What he had to say was no doubt worth listening to — if one was interested in racing. Valentine was n't; but still he knew they were discussing the Grand National, and that Jerry M. was a good horse. He walked across to the centre table, put down the "Nation" and took up the "Sportsman."

Jerry M. was quoted in the betting, but he was n't favourite. And surely there was a mistake somewhere: the favourite was in the same stable and belonged to the same owner, and neither owner nor stable was of the kind that enjoyed putting the public in the cart by winning with a second string. Valentine went back to his seat. His friend was still talking: —

"One can't always say all one knows. Racing's a funny game. Of course, Cackler deserves to be favourite, but he won't be favourite when the flag falls — no, I won't bet on that, thanks: I know too much. But, frankly, I'm going to back Jerry M. And if you two chaps have any sense you'll drop Cackler on the strength of what I tell you. If you're on already, hedge. But I'm off," and he got up to go — "Oh, hullo, Barat. Never see you now. Turned serious, have you? You miss a lot of fun. Did you hear what I was saying? Go and put your shirt on Jerry M. Don't wait till Monday, do it now. Do it at once. But perhaps you don't bet. I dare say you're right. It's a mug's game. Well, ta-ta."

Valentine returned to the "Nation," but he could n't get the talk he had heard out of his mind. He remembered enough about the turf to know that strange things often happened, and that if the favourite was so obviously being proclaimed no good by a friend of the stable it was as likely as not that something had gone wrong. Harland had told him not to wait till Monday. It looked pretty clear. Should he take his advice and go and back Jerry M. at once? It was possible that the whole thing was providential and that he'd found the way, if he had enough courage to take it, out of his difficulty. His tea finished, he searched for some exposition of the facts in the other sporting papers. Cackler was a strong favourite and had been heavily supported; that at least was clear. At his best Jerry M. was a second string.

From reading about the National, Valentine passed naturally into reading about the Lincolnshire Handicap, the other and earlier big race of the coming week. These were the two races that had first interested him in the turf. He remembered how keen he had been and how sure that he had found an easy road to wealth. Well, one altered. He could n't imagine himself taking up that life again, buying edition after edition of the evening papers, reading almost nothing but the sporting opinions of writers whom after events generally proved to be singularly unreliable judges. But it was rather amusing to throw himself back into it for a moment, to read again all that old jargon that had meant so much to him, to find that the old *clichés* still held good. And if he did back Jerry M., it need n't, it would n't,

mean that he'd relapsed. If he lost, it would be at the worst inconvenient; if he won, it would save him all immediate impending trouble. The way would be cleared. And then surely it would be flying in the face of Providence to ignore so good and direct a tip. . . .

Valentine read on. The Lincoln promised to be an interesting race. One paper gave a list of big double-event wagers in the two races. He smiled. He'd foresworn "double events" at the very outset of his racing career. But what a triumph it must be to pull one off and then to retire from the game. That was what, if fate were kind and spirited, ought to happen to him. What, if he were determined on a double, should he couple with Jerry M.? It would n't do any harm to play with the idea.

Apparently the race was something of a puzzle. No one horse had been pitched into the handicap in such a way as to make his success seem to the prophets a foregone conclusion. There was a favourite, of course,—the bookmakers may be trusted to see to that,—but there were also several other fancied horses, of no one of whom did Valentine remember even having heard. He looked at the list of likely runners much as a woman who had never been on a race-course does when a race-card is first put into her hand. He looked to see who the owners were; he looked at the jockeys; and then he considered the names of the horses themselves and their pedigrees. On the whole, judged by these last very different standards, Cinderello appealed to him most, and he read through several sporting articles to see what chance the horse was supposed to have. Certainly he

was fancied, and he'd been backed. And gradually for no true reason Valentine developed a hunch that Cinderello would prove to be the winner. He could n't have told you why — and after all, he was n't going to back him, or any other horse in the race, so that it was n't worth while to pursue the matter very carefully into the recesses of his consciousness. But he *was* going to back Jerry M., and the sooner he went and did it the better, he supposed. King Street was n't far off: he'd walk round now.

At 15A King Street Valentine was received as a long-lost friend.

'Why, Mr. Barat, you *are* a stranger. We're glad to see you. You'll have a drink and a cigar. It's years since we had the pleasure of sending you a cheque — or of seeing your signature on the front of one either. Been away?"

Valentine explained that he'd rather lost interest in racing and that anyhow he'd come to the conclusion that only professionals could hope to win. "It's really a mug's game," he said, quoting his friend of the afternoon.

"P'r'aps. I'll allow that if there were n't a few mugs about we'd never hold our own. And even the mugs know a thing or two nowadays. Why here's my brother just back from Kempton. The last bet he laid on the last race was five hundred to thirty the winner. That makes the week's book look silly, I can tell you. He laid it to what you'd call a mug — and you'd be right, too. But that mug'll draw six hundred and forty-three of the best on Monday all the same."

The room was full of good-humoured, healthy-looking, capable men. There was Mr. Wiseman himself, and his brother who stood up in the ring, and another of his partners, and there was Mr. Cardew, a little older, a little more dapper, a little "flyer" than when he'd first welcomed Valentine into this esoteric world. They were all in a cheerful mood; there was an air of good-fellowship.

"As you say, it's years since I've had a bet, but I've got a fancy for a horse for the National if you can give me a decent price. What can you do Jerry M. at?"

"Here, Tom, what's our price Jerry M. to Mr. Barat? Do you want much on, sir?"

"No, a fiver'll do. I'm not plunging."

"You used to!"

"I know — but I've learned wisdom."

Tom Wiseman, who'd been looking at his book, broke in with an offer of fourteen to one.

"That's not the quoted price. I thought I'd get at least sixteen to one," Valentine answered.

"You would have — yesterday. But we've got a lot of Jerry M. money to-day as things go. The price has shortened, and it looks as if it'll shorten more. You can take it or leave it." :

"All right," Valentine agreed; "put it down — seventy pounds to five."

He was rather pleased with himself. He had come down to King Street intending to have at least a pony — twenty-five pounds — on the horse, perhaps even forty pounds, but at the last moment he'd hesitated and had thought better of it. At the price he'd obtained

if Jerry M. came in first, his win would be a useful one and if he lost — well, five pounds would n't matter.

Mr. Cardew looked up. "Can't we tempt you with a double, Mr. Barat? Take something with Jerry M., why don't you? You'd get a good price."

Valentine remembered his first and last double-event bet and his determination never to wager that way again, but he also remembered his fancies of the afternoon. Almost without his intending it the words slipped out: "Well, what about Cinderello and Jerry M.?"

"You've picked two good horses, anyhow. What can we do that double at, Mr. Wiseman? We can't let Mr. Barat go away without a double of some sort if only for the sake of old times."

"Ten thousand to forty that pair," the elder Mr. Wiseman answered; "luckily we have n't got them in a double yet."

Something about this old atmosphere that he had known so well, and perhaps the good whiskey and the really excellent cigar, combined to interfere with the ordinary inhibitions of Valentine's character. The fact that he was being made much of may have had something to do with it: it flattered him. Anyhow he found himself rising to the bait: "Let me look at the weights and list of probables again," he said; "I've been out of the game so long that I really don't know what's running or anything about the horses at all."

"Here you are. But I can tell you all you want to know. Cinderello's trained at Foxhill. Robinson used in Clorane's time to keep the Lincoln in his pocket. He'll do all he can to win. It'll revive the old days."

But Valentine was looking with an affectation of knowledge at the weights, and trying to make up his mind. . . .

"All right. Put me down ten thousand to forty pounds the double, Cinderello and Jerry M.," he said, after a minute or two. "Of course, I'm giving you forty pounds, and if it means that I drift back into backing horses every day my ruin will be on the head of Mr. Cardew here."

"No fear of that, sir: you'll always keep your end up."

"I hope so, I'm sure — but good-night now. Good-night, Mr. Wiseman."

After all, he said to himself as he walked away down St. James's Street, he'd been willing at first to risk forty pounds and he'd only exceeded that sum by a fiver. In putting the large sum on Cinderello — as in effect he had done — he was backing his fancy. He believed in following an inspiration. Cinderello was reckoned to have as good a chance in his race as Jerry M. in the National.

He regretted nothing.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH CINDERELLO HELPS A LOT

VALENTINE spent most of his Sunday in his own room in Great College Street putting the finishing touches to his Leicester Square plans. They did n't satisfy, but they pleased, him. He had shown them to no one else, but he knew very well that they were an architect's work, that there was nothing essentially weak or amateurish about them. They looked workmanlike, clean. Surely they'd please his father. Arranging them once more in the order in which he wanted them looked at, and folding them tenderly in their leather case, he turned to his seventh attempt at a suitable letter with which to introduce them — for he proposed that his father should look at them first and should hear him afterwards. The letter was difficult to write. So much had to be conveyed and so much guarded against. And above all, he must n't strain his reader's interest by being verbose: —

MY DEAR FATHER [he began], — I am writing this before your work on the Palace of Empire is at an end, but I want you to read it directly after. Please do be patient with it.

I know very well that I have seemed a very unsatisfactory son to you. I have seemed to you to be a fritterer, not to be serious, to care not at all for my work.

Indeed, Sir, you have been wrong, although no doubt the fault has been mine. I asked when I came down from Oxford for nothing better than to become an architect, to work at your side, to work at anything that you gave me. But I must have gone the wrong way about it: you have always thought me incapable, an idler. And yet you'll remember that more than once I asked you to give me a chance, even to let me work elsewhere for a while. You were satisfied that that would all be useless. However, I did n't lose heart, and after your last refusal I determined to do a piece of work on my own account. Without saying a word to any one about it I set to.

You'll think the work I chose absurd, perhaps, and the more so in that by no possible chance could it have any practical use. It may seem like mere wasting of my time. But I thought that perhaps you'd understand. If there's any good in it at all, you'll recognise it. What I did was to make myself acquainted with all the conditions governing the Palace of Empire site and building, and then, avoiding as far as possible knowing the details of what you were doing (and perhaps that will explain to you now why I seemed to take a lukewarm interest in its progress), to work at it in my own way, to make all the drawings just as if the commission had been given to *me* instead of to you. Of course, I know that much of what I've done will seem egregious to you. I must have made a hundred mistakes fatal to the whole of my plan, but you'll allow for my lack of experience, of practice. No one has helped me; I've asked no direct advice—and, Sir, I have worked. You'll be able to see that.

Now, Sir, I want you to look at my drawings. I shall get up early on the morning you get this and so as to be out of the way I shall go for a walk and not come back till lunch-time. You'll know by then if you have anything good to say about them. And if you have, if they have convinced you that I am worth a little encouragement and that I'm not such a waster as you've had all too much cause to think, then I want you to let me have a talk with you about the office and about my future. I can't forget that I'm in my twenty-seventh year and that if I'm to do anything I must do it now.

Your affectionate son,

VALENTINE BARAT.

That was the best he could do. He dated the letter, addressed it to his father, and put it away in a drawer of his desk against the coming Saturday night, when he'd hand it to the maid to go up on the following morning with Mr. Barat's early cup of tea. Now he had seven days to wait, a whole week in which, in spite of the fact that the office was congested with work and that Mr. Barat was overburdened with every kind of detail, most of which Valentine was quite competent, and would have liked nothing better than, to deal with, he would have nothing whatever to do. He could n't very well go to Paris. His work was finished as well as he could finish it. He could only see seven days of extreme dulness before him, of dulness and yet of gnawing anxiety. Then would come, perhaps, what was his only, his last, chance of impressing his father . . . and perhaps he'd muff it. And next week there was Mr.

Fordyce, and, at the back of everything else, there was Julie.

However, the slowest days, the dullest hours, pass away. On Tuesday Valentine lunched with Martin Fahey, who had just come back from a fortnight's attendance on his chief in Northumberland. He was in high spirits and full of inquiries as to the progress of the Barat-Fenelon engagement.

"Why don't you get the thing finished, my dear fellow? You never seem to have any work to do; you appear to have a most useful and accommodating father who keeps you in very pleasant luxury — surely now is the time to get married. Julie Fenelon's got money of her own, too. What is the good of waiting?"

"I don't want to wait, Fahey. Indeed, I hope I'll manage to marry this very summer. But you can't do these things without money, and truly I have n't got a bob. My 'useful and accommodating father' does n't believe in my capacity; that's the reason he gives me no work to do. But as I don't work seriously I don't get paid seriously. I have a salary and an allowance — but they are n't enough to marry on. I'm going into the whole matter with my father on Sunday. We shall have got that blessed Palace off our hands then. And that reminds me I've got the two seats for you. You'll see everything very well" — and he wandered off into talking of the arrangements for the ceremony of the following Saturday.

It was Tuesday, I say, and that particular Tuesday was the day on which the Lincolnshire Handicap was run. Valentine had remembered it on and off during

the morning, but always with distaste and impatience. When he had walked away from Mr. Wiseman's, warm with the genial gossip of the bookmaker's parlour, he had regretted nothing, but he'd come to regret his speculation again and again since then. What an ass he had been to be lured into chucking forty pounds — forty-five pounds more likely — into the gutter, just now of all times when every sovereign was of such vital importance. Why, forty-five pounds was just about all he had in the bank. He'd entirely ignored the racing page of his daily papers since Saturday. The depression of loss would come all in good time. There was no need to elate or depress himself meanwhile. For all he knew both Cinderello and Jerry M. had been scratched. It would come in the long run to the same thing, no doubt, whether they ran or not.

But he was n't to be allowed to dismiss the matter. "I say, the Lincoln's run to-day," Fahey, looking at his watch, broke into a pause by remarking; "I wonder what's won. The result ought to be up by now. Hi, waiter, send me a boy"; and the boy on arrival was sent off to see whether the tape would n't give the information he wanted.

"You don't race, Barat. You save money, but you miss some excitement. On a day like this it gives a little colour to life to know that in a few minutes' time you may be fifty pounds richer or ten poorer. It's one of the ways in which one can get a little romance, a little wonder, into one's grey life. As a matter of fact, though, I have n't a bet to-day. But I do want to know what's won."

So did Valentine, but not eagerly. Even when the gambling habit had had him most firmly in its clutches he'd never hastened to know the result of his "investments," and to-day he had wished to banish for as long as he could the knowledge that his folly had made him so many pounds poorer. His pessimism, however, proved to be misplaced. The boy reappeared: —

"Cinderello's won."

"Well, I should n't have backed that one, anyway," said Fahey. "But don't let me interest you in the accursed business, Barat, especially just now when you are on the point of becoming a married man, and have to be prudent. Here, I must go. I've time to walk if you're going my way."

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE STABLE IS SAID TO FEAR NOTHING

THAT night Valentine did n't sleep. After he had left Fahey in Whitehall, he had had time to think of what Cinderello's win meant to him. He'd bought a paper from a flying newsboy and had learnt that the horse had started at nine to one. If his forty pounds had been invested on it alone he'd have won, even after paying Mr. Wiseman's commission, three hundred and forty-two pounds. That would have put him right with Mr. Fordyce, as far at least as the first of the bills were concerned. What a fool he'd been if he had to bet not to have backed Cinderello outright. He'd had a hunch that it'd win and it had won, and yet, through his folly in mixing its chance of success with those of another horse, it was pretty certain that he would n't benefit a penny.

But one thing was clear: if Jerry M. did win the National, he would be the richer by no less than ten thousand pounds. That would n't bear thinking about. He'd won hundreds, several hundreds, often enough — but thousands, ten thousand . . . ! He could hardly face the thought of it. It would mean that all, all his troubles, his money troubles at least, would fade away, and that still he'd have, when every penny that he owed was paid, thousands with which to start his married life. But he must take a pull on himself. Jerry M.

might have been scratched, he told himself again. It was not at all unlikely. Grand National favourites had a habit of going amiss.

Valentine, in search of a news agent, made his way down to the Westminster Bridge platform. A "Sportsman" showed him at once that he need have no fear as to Jerry M.'s well-being. He was as nearly as possible favourite, while his stable companion Cackler was n't even mentioned — for the best of reasons, Valentine discovered later on: he'd pulled up lame after a gallop on the morning of the very day on which Harland had said so confidently that he could be ignored; and in due course he'd been struck out of the race. It was easy to gather from the betting returns, from the training reports, and from the articles of "Vigilant" and "The Special Commissioner," that Jerry M. was expected to prove a very efficient second string. Yes, and if he won . . . ! The thought beat in his head, refusing to be dismissed.

No, that night Valentine did not, could not, sleep. His mind would not leave the question of what was to happen three days later. And then, still dwelling on his possible gains, it circled round and round another, a more immediate, problem. He'd backed Cinderello and Jerry M. in a double-event bet to win him ten thousand pounds. The first half of the double had come off and the second half looked very much more likely to come off now than it had looked on Saturday when the bet was made. Then Jerry M. was far from being favourite, the bookmakers had no reason to suspect that there was anything the matter with Cackler. But

now — well, Cackler was gone, and the stable were evidently very well satisfied to be represented by his companion. Mr. Wiseman should be willing to give at least five hundred pounds to call the bet off — possibly he'd give much more in all the circumstances. Or he himself could call off half of it and so make certain of winning two or three hundred whatever happened to Jerry M., and of winning well over five thousand if the horse should come in first. When he had girded that afternoon at his folly in not backing Cinderello outright instead of in a double, he'd overlooked this possibility. As a matter of fact, owing to the improvement in the market position of his National horse, he was better off now than if he had put his money on Cinderello alone.

Should he hedge?

Ultimately Valentine could come to no conclusion. He decided to wait and see what counsel the morning brought. Perhaps Mr. Wiseman would himself propose his hedging. If that should happen he'd be in a stronger position, and, if he chose, would be able to drive a better bargain.

When Valentine dragged his weary person down to breakfast the next day, he found no letter from Mr. Wiseman. That worthy was no doubt wise in his generation. Perhaps he argued that if Valentine did want to hedge, he'd come in and suggest it himself; perhaps he did n't think so much of Jerry M.'s chance, and so saw no reason for caution; perhaps the possible loss of ten thousand pounds on Jerry M. would be so much more

than counterbalanced by what he'd make on the failure of the other horses that he was quite pleased to allow the bet to stand without alteration. One may be sure that in any case it neither troubled his daylight reflections nor his night dreams.

For Valentine, however, Wednesday and Thursday were the most distracted days that he had ever spent. He was able to settle to nothing. There was no one to whom he could talk of his possible good fortune. Not even to Fahey, who had become so involved in his affairs, had he ever spoken of his whilom interest in horse-racing; and although there was nothing particularly compromising in his having a double-event bet, nothing which showed that gambling had, for a time at least, been a passion with him, yet he could n't somehow bring himself to declare now how concerned he was in a matter so entirely outside his usual life. He smiled when he recalled that the only person in his circle who had any reason to suspect the facts was his father. And during these days his secret weighed heavily on him. The one thing that he carried always in his mind was that on Friday afternoon he might, that, indeed, it seemed not at all unlikely that he would, be a rich man — rich enough, that is to say, even when all his debts were paid, to be independent of his father's decision as to the value or worthlessness of his plans. He could n't help counting his chickens. The interest on, say, eight thousand pounds, which he would have clear of any claims, might surely be estimated at three hundred a year. His salary and allowance amounted to four hundred. Perhaps his father, even though he might prove

totally unsympathetic with regard to the work he'd done and the work he wanted to do, would wish to help on his marriage and would make a more generous arrangement. And Julie had money of her own. Valentine, among whose faults certainly that of being mercenary could not be reckoned, had no idea on what income Mrs. Fenelon and her daughter lived, but he knew that Julie was in her way independent. Between them they should be able to count on a thousand a year. Surely that should prove sufficient. They would need to avoid extravagance.

So he would argue to himself — and then suddenly he'd pull himself up and tell himself that he was a fool. It was the eve of the race now. Jerry M. was certainly more and more fancied. But his price in the betting was eight and a half to one, and that meant that, even if it were a fair price, the chances of Valentine's dream coming true were exactly twelve in a hundred. Things don't happen that way, he told himself. Why should they? Besides, he remembered a good deal about the Grand National. It was always said that it was more than even money against a horse standing up over so stiff a course. Four and a half miles of the heavy obstacles of the Aintree country wanted skill and luck and strength. Jerry M. seemed a good horse, and he would n't lack assistance from Driscoll, who was about as capable a cross-country jockey as England could afford; but however good the horse was, it was always more than possible, probable even, that he might be interfered with, knocked over, balked, by some less skilful runner who had managed to get rid of his own

jockey. Why, in a Grand National half the field might be riderless before half the distance was covered. If only his money was on an eight and a half to one chance in an ordinary handicap on the flat. But then again the Grand National was the one classic race of the year, and in such a case every horse could be depended upon to be delivered at the post as fit as hands could make him; and his jockey, too,— he'd be anxious, perhaps over-anxious, for the honours of winning such an event.

But all this thinking, this balancing of chances, was vain, vain, Valentine realised. What was to be would be. It was Friday now, the day of the race, and he'd been to his office and had tried to interest himself in what little he knew of the work that was going on. But his thoughts were like a hammer in his head, his mouth was dry; Mr. Wilson fancied he must be ill. "You'd better go home, Mr. Valentine, and rest. You don't look half up to the mark. I do hope you have n't got influenza. You must be well for to-morrow. If you have got a chill some quinine, bed, and a hot drink will perhaps keep it under."

And Valentine, who had almost forgotten about the next day's ceremony, answered without conviction that he felt all right save for a little headache, that he'd go out directly, and try and get rid of it with fresh air — "and, anyhow, Wilson, run away now like a good chap: I want to write some letters. I'll be quite as right to-morrow as there's any need for me to be — but I don't flatter myself that my presence is essential to the ceremony. I don't think my father would miss me."

"And I dare say he's right about that," Mr. Wilson reflected as he went out, closing the door softly.

Left alone, Valentine wrote no letters. He knew he had no influenza; he knew also that whether he sought fresh air, or stopped in his stuffy room, or went round to look at the final preparations in Leicester Square, he could n't escape his distracting thoughts. He drew up a chair to the fire, began to read the leading article in the "Times," failed even to follow the argument through its first paragraph, poked viciously at the coals, drew out the letter he'd received from Paris that morning, found a momentary interest in seeing again what Julie Fenelon had to say, thought that whatever happened that afternoon it would be pleasant to be with her that evening — for Mrs. Fenelon and her daughter were arriving in London so as to be present at the opening of the Palace of Empire on the morrow — and then, flinging the "Times" into a corner and hastily donning his coat and hat, he went out into the black east wind. The early racing edition of the "Evening News" told him that Jerry M., who had closed at the slightly less satisfactory price of nine to one overnight, was on this morning of the race very much in demand. Either he or Judas would start first favourite. Granted ordinary luck in the running, the stable were said to fear nothing.

Valentine had the sudden idea of seeking oblivion in a Turkish bath.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH A TURKISH BATH IS CHOSEN AS A REFUGE AND VALENTINE CANNOT KEEP AWAY FROM THE TAPE MACHINE

JUDGING from the depressed appearance of the majority of the visitors to the ordinary Turkish baths, it would seem to be a very usual thing for the man who must seek refuge from himself and from the world to choose those stuffy halls to stultify his thoughts. Valentine looked round and thought that he had never seen either a less attractive place or a more unpleasant lot of creatures than the people — visitors, attendants, masseurs — who were lolling or strolling about in various stages of undress or diverse kinds of soiled uniform. He raged to himself against the necessity of undressing in public; he raged against the brute ugliness of his immediate neighbours. How well it was that convention and the law made it essential that clothes should be worn. The black coat of the ordinary man, his tie, his white collar, his hat, and his gold eyeglasses distracted attention from his flaccid, discoloured face, his nerveless, abundant figure. Valentine found himself hating his kind, and in his distaste forgot for a few minutes his own troubles. But they went only for a little while. Picking his way gingerly into the hot room, and seeking quietude at full length on a couch whose heat he could hardly bear, all his difficulties came back

to him. There was no oblivion here. And later his masseur would insist on talking of the Grand National and assuring his unresponsive victim that, bar accidents, Judas was a "cert."

"Maybe," Valentine grunted, turning over on the marble slab, against which he wished he had the right and the courage to beat the slave's head.

At length, however, he was more or less alone, wrapped in many bath-towels, laid out for repose. He saw that it was one o'clock. Perhaps after his white night he would be able to sleep for a couple of hours; the race was at three — if he had any luck he might attain forgetfulness till after it had been run.

Helped by a cup of tea and the gentle influence of some hot buttered toast, Valentine did sleep, slept to dream heavily of Porton and Le Vrai Robinson. He was awakened suddenly by the noisy conversation of two men who were undressing in the next alcove. They, too, were discussing the accursed race. He looked at his watch. It wanted only twenty minutes to the moment at which the flag would fall. He would dress slowly and then walk home. It would be time enough to know the result if he bought a paper just before the Paris train arrived at Charing Cross. He wished to postpone the evil moment just as long as was possible.

Valentine was dressed and in St. James's Street by five minutes past three, dressed but far from in his right mind. Almost at any moment now the raucous voices of the young ruffians who sell the evening papers might render the afternoon hideous with their cry, "Grand National Result." And no doubt the tape machines

had already ticked out an announcement of its start behind the portals of these clubs he was passing. He reached the corner of King Street. Something stronger than his own will forced him to pause. Would n't it be better to take the few paces to Mr. Wiseman's office, to learn the result, and to put himself out of his agony? It was n't what he had planned, but . . .

Mr. Cardew greeted him affably. "Good-afternoon, Mr. Barat. Come to see what's won, I suppose? I'd be anxious myself if I had your bet. Perhaps you don't know Jerry M.'s favourite. All the money's for your horse; it'll start very hot. They're not off yet. Well, I could n't wish you a better bet, and I don't know any one else I'd rather have booked it to — so, here's luck!" And he raised his glass and drank to Valentine's success. "I don't think you've got much to fear except Judas."

The room was fairly crowded. Mr. Wiseman was there, and a couple of clerks, and there was the usual stream of telegraph boys, and there were three friends of the house drinking whiskey-and-sodas and smoking big cigars and discussing affairs at the Cape just as if it was an ordinary day and not big with the result of the greatest cross-country race of the year.

Valentine was distressed at the discovery that his agony was to be long-drawn-out. He had made sure when he opened the door that he'd find his fate decided when he crossed the threshold. And here he was doomed to minutes of waiting. And Judas! Every one seemed to talk or write about that horse in the last twenty-four hours. To hide his concern he picked up the "Sporting

Life." The first paragraph he saw was headed "The Claims of Judas," and the writer finished his consideration of the runner's chances by plumping solidly for that disagreeably named beast. "All associated with him are sanguine. We know he can get the course all right," and so on.

Mr. Cardew looked sympathetically at Valentine. He was a young man of varied experience, and his customer's pretended indifference deceived him not at all. He had just opened his mouth to utter some new time-passing commonplace when a boy in an inner room announced: "They're off."

"Go inside, Mr. Barat, if you like, and see the result come up on the tape yourself," Mr. Cardew said, and Valentine was n't able to withstand the temptation.

The machine, having announced the start, was still. Perhaps there would be some brief words to show the progress of the race, but the result could n't come up for at least ten minutes. Four and a half miles would take more than that to cover.

"Z-z-z-z" — the tape was moving again; "Several horses down first fence" was slowly spelled out. "God send mine is n't one of them," Valentine murmured.

"Z-z-z . . . Valentine's Brook" — the name of one of the obstacles: a coincidence — "Fetlar's Pride leading" ("never heard of that one," Valentine said to himself), "followed by Jerry M."

There was a pause. Valentine had time to draw his breath. There was no need to despair yet. Likely enough Fetlar's Pride was leading on sufferance —

"Z-z-z . . . Jerry M. leading."

"Eugh!" That *looked* all right. And Judas had n't even been mentioned yet.

"Z-z-z . . . Beecher's Brook. Jerry M. still leading."

Valentine knew enough about the course to know that the horses were now not so very far from the finish. He'd know the best or the worst in a few seconds.

"Z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z." It was a false alarm. The tape took meaningless letters.

Valentine looked round the room. Mr. Cardew, he discovered, was at his elbow. Not till that moment had he noticed that any one was there save the boy whose business it was to announce the "off" and the result as they came up on the machine.

"So Jerry M.'s leading," Mr. Cardew remarked. "It looks, Mr. Barat, as if we shall have a pretty penny to pay you on Monday. Well, if any of the favourites win I hope for your sake it will be yours, 'pon my word I do." And he went back to his desk, too used to big races and their attendant incidents to attach any very special importance to this Grand National, or perhaps too philosophical to care to snatch the result a moment earlier at the cost of the trouble of standing up.

Valentine did n't find it easy to control himself. He thought he must say, must do, something to carry him through these last seconds of waiting. He stepped to the door. "They're so long with the result that I expect your machine's broken down," he said as lightly as he could. He was afraid of his voice breaking.

There was a clicking behind him, and he turned quickly, more quickly than he would have wished.

Mere letters again. The machine was getting ready. . . . No new thing happened.

The suspense was becoming unbearable. Valentine looked at his watch. Then taking his umbrella from the table on which he had laid it he hung it on his arm. He searched his pockets for his gloves and drew them slowly onto his hands. . . . There was a further movement of the machine. This time it meant business. "Winner J—"

Followed a second's pause and in that second Valentine proved in his own person that one can cram a lifetime of experience, of thought, into the smallest passage of time. In the moment of sinking one is told the drowning man has the whole of his life pass before his mind. In this moment Valentine thought of all that the "J" seemed to mean to him, and of all that yet possibly it might not mean. For the name of the second favourite, that name which so ominously had been missing so far from all the preparatory tape record, also began with a "J." Would the next letter be a "u" and spell the ruin of his hopes, or would it be an "e" and confirm them? He was just calm enough to realise the two possibilities.

He bit his lip and tried to hold himself in hand.

Again a noise, but still "Winner J—" were the only signs on the tape; and then suddenly, almost, it seemed to Valentine, without warning, there came an "e."

Not for one moment more could he stand there. Quickly he turned, and almost before the men in the outer office could realise his departure he had gone, cannoning into a minute telegraph boy who happened

to open the door from the outside just in time to facilitate Valentine's disappearance.

So he was saved. So he was rich. All his troubles were at an end.

CHAPTER V

TEN THOUSAND AND SEVENTY POUNDS

VALENTINE made his way back to Great College Street in a dream. Letting himself in with his latchkey and shouting down the stairs to the kitchen that he required no tea, he ran, three steps at a time, to his room and flung himself on his bed. He felt that if he waited, if he were interrupted, his nerves would break. Now he had the greater part of two hours to pull himself together. Julie's train would n't arrive till after five. He must be calm for that.

But calmness came not at command. Round and round raced his thoughts. Ten thousand and seventy pounds! Ten thousand and seventy pounds! Again and again the fact hammered itself at the base of his brain. Something he must do to calm himself. And yet what? And he was ashamed at his own lack of control. Whence did it come? Surely not from his father, that man of iron.

Gradually the strain slackened. Valentine lay calm and collected once more. Well, he had his wish. His fairy dream had come true. The fortune was his. No need to bare all his follies to his father. No need to fear Mr. Leverton Fordyce. No need again to scan askance those oblong letters which told of tradesmen's loss of patience. What better could he do in this hour that he had to fill than go to his desk, search out his bills, and prepare his affairs for settlement.

It was an easy matter. Valentine had always had method. His bills, even if he could n't pay them at once, were always arranged, docketed, accessible against the day when he would be able to pay them. And there were n't so many of them. The money-lender's was, of course, the one item of importance. He could go round to him and take up all three of the bills at once. He would arrange it in the morning, and then on Monday the matter could be completed. He sat down there and then, wrote to Mr. Fordyce saying that he would call at eleven and that, in view of the fact that he was proposing to pay the whole sum immediately and not to wait till the several bills fell due, he hoped the financier would see his way to allow some reduction in the terms he had imposed. Valentine looked at the letter proudly. He was particularly pleased with the last sentence, the touch of business capacity. Money breeds money, he said to himself.

Then he looked at his watch. There remained a quarter of an hour before he need start for Charing Cross. Why not employ it in writing now without delay cheques for these other people, these tradesmen who had been so patient? He could date them all for Monday, and, of course, he would n't post them before that day, before he had actually lodged Mr. Wiseman's cheque in his own bank. Not that he was nervous about the bookmaker's solvency. He knew he'd get the money all right.

Julie Fenelon's train steamed into Charing Cross exactly to the moment.

"Why, Valentine, how well you look! Does n't he, Mamma? You look as if you'd come into a fortune. Perhaps it's in preparation for to-morrow. Who knows — the King may make your father a baronet, and then you'll be heir to a title. Anyhow, your ceremonial aspect is vastly becoming." She paused, and Valentine, who by now had regained all his usual calmness of spirit, found time to answer her rally: —

"No, no baronetcy this time. As a matter of fact — it's a secret, though, of course — they did offer my father a knighthood. He'd have been invested, or whatever they call it, to-morrow at the ceremony if he'd said 'yes.' But he did n't. He says there are too many knights and that they make 'em for too many reasons. The King is n't the only fountain of such honours nowadays he seems to think, but that sounds like treason. Anyway, he's satisfied with his building." And then he turned to Mrs. Fenelon who, if she saw that Valentine had hold of Julie's hand under the cover of her coat, showed no signs of her knowledge.

"Mrs. Fenelon, I've had a little stroke of luck to-day so I want you to spoil me. I know you don't want to dine out to-night after your journey, but please do, just this once. Please come and dine at the Carlton, where I first met you. I'll tell you all about the reason some other time. It's only half-past five. You've time to rest. Say 'yes' and we'll stop the taxi a minute as we drive to the Stafford and I'll run in and see that you get a meal and a place worthy of you and of the occasion. Please tell your mother that she's to give way, Julie."

Mrs. Fenelon required no urging. In a few minutes

they had plucked their two steamer trunks from the disgraceful medley of unrelated baggage with which Charing Cross daily affronts the amenities of travel, and a taxi had been found. Valentine sat between the ladies, his hand still holding Julie's. It was an affair of a moment only to see the Carlton manager and to exact a promise that Monsieur Escoffier himself would take an interest in their dinner, a dinner for four, of whom two were ladies who liked good food, and that if he had time he would with his own hands create an *Entremet Fenelon* that was to be dominated by the special flavour that Mrs. Fenelon, dear greedy soul, adored.

For that evening Valentine had determined, unless the daughter forbade, to ask the mother for Julie's hand. For that reason Fahey had been invited. He was to serve a double purpose: in the early stages of the evening he could talk to Mrs. Fenelon; later on he could sit in the Palm Court a little apart with Julie while Valentine tackled her mother.

"I shall come to fetch you at eight o'clock punctually," Valentine announced when they reached the Stafford; "you must be punctual because of the dinner. And as for you, Julie," — he had dropped his voice, — "oh, dear one, I love you so much. Come down a few seconds before your mother to-night. I want to talk to you alone, darling."

Julie nodded a happy apprehension of his words. "And I want to talk to *you*, oh, so much!" she said.

Valentine got back into the waiting taxi and told the driver to take him home. He was n't in the mood to go walking about London to-night.

CHAPTER VI

AN EVENING WHICH BEGINS SO WELL AND ENDS SO DAMNABLY

OUT of mere kindness of heart, of gaiety, Valentine tossed the chauffeur who brought him at ten minutes to eight to the Stafford what in his then mood he'd describe as "five bob," and he handed the like sum to the doorman of the hotel, "just to celebrate the occasion," he said. "I hope you backed the winner to-day," he added.

"No such luck, Sir. How could you fancy that one, anyway? I did n't think he had a dog's chance."

"Perhaps not — last Saturday, but any one could see that he was expected after that." Valentine did n't wait to continue the conversation. Eagerly he ran up the steps and passed through into the lobby where erstwhile he had waited with Porton for Julie and her mother. How since then everything had altered. Now Julie was his own; and then, too, to-night for the first time since he could remember he was not harassed by a cloud of money worries; to-night he was rich!

Once more he had to kick his heels. The page had told him that the ladies would be down at once. He watched the elevator.

"Would you like the evening paper, Sir?" The solicitous page disliked seeing any one so nervously impatient as this guest showed himself to be.

Valentine took the "Evening Standard" out of civility. He had no wish to look at it. His experience, his good fortune, of the afternoon had crowded out all other interests.

The feature of the evening's news proved to be an account of the preparations for the morrow's opening of the Palace of Empire. He knew enough about that! Turning the pages listlessly and finding nothing to arrest an attention that was more devoted to watching the elevator than to reading, he flung the paper face downwards on to the table. Surely that was Julie's voice. The elevator bell rang. Valentine looked at his watch: it was three minutes to eight. He straightened himself out. Then he heard Julie cry: "Wait one second: I've forgotten something." His mind wandered and he gazed aimlessly about the hall, his eyes fastening themselves first on one and then another meaningless detail. Julie's "something" was taking a long time. Carelessly he took up the paper again. His eyes fell on the last page. Its first column was headed "A Sensational Grand National." Why, he thought with a half reproach, he had n't even troubled to look at a description of the race that had meant so much to him.

So Judas that he had so much feared had fallen at the first fence. If he'd known that, he'd have been spared those last few moments of suspense when at the finish the tape had ticked out "Winner J —" and he had waited in a fever of anxiety for the next letter to prove itself an "e" or a "u." Evidently the "grief" in the race had been unusual. His eye passed down the column and then suddenly, just as he heard the elevator

door on the landing above clang to, suddenly his hand shook, his heart stood still. "Jenkinstown"! —

But the elevator had come down to his level. Its iron gate swung back. Julie stepped out, happily conscious of her own charm, her eyes alight, the gayest colour in her cheeks.

"Valentine, I'm later than I intended. But I could n't get my hair right. We'll only be alone for a minute. I am so sorry, dear. Quick, what did you want to say to me?"

"Nothing, darling, nothing. I'm just glad to see you, that's all."

Julie looked at him in perplexity. "Why, what's the matter, Valentine? You looked so well this afternoon and now—why, you look quite white. Can't I get something for you?"

"Darling, it's nothing, nothing at all. I'm a little overdone, perhaps, and it's hot here after the street."

"Well, sit down, anyway, and tell me you're glad to see me. I want to hear that. And tell me again that you love me."

Valentine smiled mechanically. "You know all those things; I've told you them again and again." His fingers stretched out to the paper on the table at his side. Half unconsciously he slid it towards him and then picked it up. His eyes knew where to look: —

3.0.—The GRAND NATIONAL STEEPECHASE (handicap) of 2400 sovs. including a trophy value of 125 sovs.
About 4 miles and 856 yards.

17. Mr. Stanley Howard's b. g. JENKINSTOWN, by Hackler-Playmate, 9 yrs., 10 st. 5 lb. (Eton blue, olive-green sash) R. CHADWICK 1

1 Mr. C. G. Asheton-Smith's b. g. JERRY M., by
Walmgate, dam by Luminary-Quinine, 7 yrs., 12 st.
7 lb. (dark green, crimson cap) . E. DRISCOLL 2

From this blot of figures and letters two words and two figures stood out as if written in scarlet. "Jenkinstown 1—Jerry M. 2." One glance was enough to show him that he had made no mistake just now, that his eyes had not deceived him. His mistake had been that afternoon: "Je—" He had known that Judas was running, but of the name of "Jenkinstown" he had taken no heed. He had thought it enough to see that an "e" and not a "u" followed the "J." And now all his house of cards had fallen about his feet —

"Valentine, you are not very polite: if I had thought that you'd want to read the paper, I'd have taken longer over my dressing. But I don't believe you're well."

He looked up, and a warning look in Julie Fenelon's eyes made him pull himself together. He brushed the paper on to the floor and tried to shut tight one room in his mind. He must forget for a few hours all that Fate had shown him this afternoon and had now so rudely withdrawn.

"I'm a donkey, Julie. Forgive me. I did n't mean to be rude. I was n't well, perhaps, and I did things unconsciously."

"Don't do it again then, Sir, or I shall be very angry. And here's Mamma. Come along, Mamma; there is n't much time to spare. And Valentine says the heat here has made him feel ill. That sounds to me nonsense. He should try our New York hotels. But he shall have an

open window in the taxi — or would you like to sit next the chauffeur and catch your death of cold?"

Fahey was waiting for them; the dinner had all the varied excellences that had been promised: externally everything was as Valentine had wished; but his heart and his spirit were stone-cold. Mrs. Fenelon had no momentous question propounded to her that night. Both she and Julie found Valentine very dull and rather stupid.

"Perhaps, poor dear, he's had too much work to do over the ceremony to-morrow," the older lady suggested.

Julie knew better than that, but she also knew that something had gone wrong. She had begged to be told what it was.

"It is n't anything, dear; nothing is altered from the last time I saw you — nothing, nothing."

No one of the party found it a very pleasant evening.

CHAPTER VII

THE PALACE OF EMPIRE IS OPENED, CHATEAU YQUEM IS DRUNK, AND FERGUSSON DEPARTS

VALENTINE went home from his party cold and sick, a little dazed, too, from the emotions of the day. But he was sleepy. His brain was exhausted. Hardly could he tumble into bed before he was unconscious.

All too soon came the morning, the important morning of Saturday. It was essential that he should fetch the Fenelons betimes. This was to be no ordinary function. Short of having the day as a bank holiday, London, in so far at least as the amusement end of it was concerned, was *en fête*. If they delayed, Valentine and his guests might find it no easy matter to get to their places.

Before starting he went to his father's door and knocked:—

“I am going off now, Sir. You'll remember I am taking friends.”

Mr. Barat, his braces hanging down his back and with hairbrush in hand, came to his door, opened it, and looked angrily at his son:—

“I will not be disturbed in this way. I have told your mother again and again that I cannot have noise and interruptions —” He stopped, and passed his hand wearily over his forehead. “Oh, it's you, is it, Valen-

tine? You're ready. I almost wish you could have gone with me and stopped by my side. But I should have thought of it earlier. You have friends going with you, I know. Well, hurry along. It will be pleasant to have a quiet day to-morrow. I feel very tired."

Valentine was too much concerned with his own affairs, and too sore still, to give much serious heed to what his father had said, but as he gave a last finishing sweep to his silk hat with the velvet pad in the hall downstairs it came into his mind that he had n't looked well, that he had n't spoken very clearly. That he had resented being disturbed was n't surprising. That was his way. But what was it he had said? Something about his mother? Perhaps he'd heard wrong, and anyhow there was no time to waste now. His last words had been kind enough. "A quiet day to-morrow." Valentine smiled a little grimly; it would n't be so quiet, he feared; and then his mind went racing off into what had been snatched from him yesterday.

The one thing which distinguished the opening of the Palace of Empire from the opening of a dozen other buildings by the King during the year was that here at last was a great and worthy temple, that dignity was in its every line, that it towered massive, immense, over a London which flowed round its walls, and that it belonged both to London and to all that far world which counted London as its city. It was no doubt well that Mr. Barat had refused the proffered knighthood. Here was sufficient honour, sufficient monument. The idea had been born in his head, he had worked it out to its uttermost detail, his business energy had made it

possible; almost it might be said he had built it with his own pair of hands. And now here it stood — the largest edifice in the world, the most multiplex, the most useful, the most and the least commercial, a proud and glorious challenge.

The King had gone, the shouting had died away, the mounted police had trotted off, the ceremony was at an end. Far, far aloft, in the uttermost height of the tower which looked out over the heart of England, Mr. Barat was, and Lord Butterby and Sir Edward Drakelow, their fellow-directors, the contractor, too, — a group of the men who had been most concerned with the undertaking,—with their womenfolk, they were gathered together for one minute of mutual congratulation before they parted, to meet again, most of them, that evening at the banquet which was to be the crowning episode of the day. Mrs. Fenelon and Julie, Martin Fahey and a young woman whom he'd produced to-day for the first time, who simpered in the most effective manner, dressed in the most discordant colours, called her escort by his Christian name, and generally seemed in training to become Mrs. Fahey and to damp down the pleasant Hibernian spirits of her spouse — they were all there. Lord Butterby it had been who had suggested that when everything was over there should be this foregathering and that a little champagne should be drunk in honour, and to the good fortune, of the enterprise. He had also chosen this extreme height, a room, a hall, set under the final decorations of the highest tower, a room which Mr. Barat had set apart for his own use as the office of the architect of the building.

"No, don't let it be champagne, Lord Buttery," Mr. Barat had pleaded when the question had first been raised; "let's have something a little better, finer."

"Just as you like. If you know a quarter as much about wine as you do about architecture, we shall do all right," Lord Buttery had replied.

So it was in Chateau Yquem of 1874 that the Palace was toasted and the health of Mr. Barat as its chief spirit was drunk; and it is necessary to add that many of the wives and daughters thought its substitution for champagne showed a curious spirit of meanness which augured ill for the future of the enterprise.

And not at once did any one show signs of going away. There was so much to talk of; the aspect of London from the leaded windows which looked out from all four sides of the room was so entrancing. Mr. Barat detached himself after a while from a group of unsympathetic financial bigwigs on whom the rare wine was having quite a humanising effect, and came across to his son:—

"Valentine, I want you to do something for me at once, if you please: I want you to find Fergusson and to bring him here. He ought to share in this supplementary celebration if anybody ought. He 's in the building surely — it 's likely you 'll find him in the great hall: that 's his particular joy."

"I 'll go at once. But first, Sir, I want to introduce you to some very great friends of mine, Mrs. Fenelon and her daughter. They 've come over from Paris to see this —"

A laugh lit up Mr. Barat's face as unexpectedly as sudden sunshine from behind a dark cloud. "From Paris,

you say. Perhaps, then, Miss Fenelon, you can tell me what it is that keeps taking my son to Paris and from his father's side — ”

But Valentine had gone, wondering as he sped down the elevator what could account for his father's good spirits, his cheerful gaiety.

When in a few minutes he returned, Fergusson, his father's faithful henchman, at his heels, Mr. Barat was still talking to the Fenelons. “He seems to like them, thank Heaven,” Valentine said to himself. It would make his horrid task of the morrow so much the easier if Mr. Barat had taken to Julie.

Mr. Barat took Fergusson's hand. “This is the man who's done most of the work, Mrs. Fenelon. I could n't have got on without him.” And then, taking his arm, he carried him across the room to Lord Butterby and a knot of his colleagues: —

“Lord Butterby, I'm going to interrupt you for a minute. You've heard me speak of Fergusson. I've told you what a wonder he is. Well, here he is, and you've got to ask him to drink a glass of wine with you. This building would not be what it is if it had n't been for him.”

Lord Butterby looked a slightly bored acquiescence: —

“Mr. Fergusson, I drink your health, and I give you the thanks of the Board. It must be a proud thing to work with a gentleman like Mr. Barat on a building like this, and it must be a proud thing to have men like you working for one.” Lord Butterby might be a mere figure-head, but he had his noble uses and accomplishments. Among them was the habit of saying the right thing with the proper skill.

The Scot in Fergusson responded vigorously: "My lord, I thank you, and I drink your health and that of the gentlemen round you, and to the success of this building. There's just one thing I'd like to say. It is an honour to work for Mr. Barat. I've worked with him and for him for forty years. And it's an honour to work on a building like this. We've all put our heart's blood into it, my lord, Mr. Barat and every one of us —"

"Lord Buttery, you've got to know the most important man about the place rather late in the day," Mr. Barat broke in as Fergusson paused. "He's giving up work and leaving London at once, going back by the afternoon train to his native Scotland, is n't that so, Fergusson? I've worked him too hard. He's as young as any of us, but his eyes trouble him, and now he's got to rest. He's kept up till the last moment, you see. But I want you to tell him on behalf of the Board that we're going to think the matter over and send him a token of his work here, something that will always remind him of it and us."

"Certainly — certainly. And I'm glad to have seen you, Mr. Fergusson."

The old Scot went back to Valentine. "Good-bye, Mr. Valentine. If you ever come to Edinburgh I hope I'll see you, Sir. Take care of your father, Mr. Valentine. He's not well — I know his look; and I'm sure he must be made to rest. I watched him at the ceremony just now and there was a moment when I thought he was going to faint. Well, good-bye, Sir — and, Mr. Valentine, that's a bonny lass you have with you. I wish you every happiness." The elevator hurried him out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII

IN WHICH COMES TRAGEDY

IN effect, as every one was afterwards glad to remember, the banquet which inaugurated the restaurant of the Palace of Empire and which was nominally intended further to celebrate the opening of that magnificent building, was really in honour of Mr. Harvey Barat, its originator, its architect, craftsman, dreamer of dreams. The most noble and distinguished of the many guests had just finished the speech in which in fitting periods he had crystallised the public mood of gratitude and admiration. Mr. Barat had risen to reply. There was a hush in the room. "A stern-faced man," guests who had not seen him so clearly before said to one another.

"My lords and gentlemen —"

There was a pause, and then Valentine, who from a seat distant by the length of the table was watching his father and nerving himself to catch every word that he uttered, saw him falter and reel. Jumping up and pushing past waiters and corpulent toast-master, he ran to his place. But he was not in time. His father had fallen, and falling had struck his head against the wainscot of the wall behind him. No one else had seen the beginning of the attack; no one had been in time to catch him as he fell.

The distinguished surgeon, whose seat near that of

the chairman enabled him to reach the fallen man almost before any one else had realised what had happened, drew his hand from the fold of Mr. Barat's shirt-front and looked up to catch Valentine's distraught and burning eyes.

"This is Mr. Barat's son, Sir Tristram," Lord Buttery explained.

Sir Tristram Hope looked at Valentine with a grave solicitude. "There is no hope, Mr. Barat: your father has gone. It was a stroke, I think. Nothing can be done."

The guests dispersed quietly, but murmuring their horror and distress. Valentine, left behind with Lord Buttery, Sir Edward Drakelow, and his uncle, Mr. Wilder, stood awkwardly at the head of the couch which had been brought in to receive his father's body. The blow had stunned him. What was he to do now? He looked down at his father's still, stern face. Now everything was too late. . . .

It was Sir Tristram who first broke the depressed silence. Such scenes were less strange to him. "Well, I must go — there is nothing that I can do, Mr. Barat, or I would willingly stop. An inquest there'll have to be, of course, and my evidence will be required. You know where to find me."

Lord Buttery and Sir Edward Drakelow were uselessly sympathetic, but Mr. Wilder knew what to do and how to do it. A little after midnight he and his nephew set off from the Palace of Empire bearing the dead body of its architect to his own home. When all was in order, Mr. Wilder excused himself. "I must go, Val. Your

aunt will wonder what has happened to me. But I will come up again in the morning. You must have some assistance; there will be a great deal for you to do." At such moments his native worth made Mr. Wilder more attractive, more kindly human, than when he moved in his usual round of facile exuberant good-fellowship and furtive pleasures.

Valentine, left by himself, sat before the fire and thought of what thirty-six hours had brought to pass. Thirty-six hours ago he had been in the Turkish bath fighting off a gnawing anxiety about an event that seemed now to him to be of the slightest possible importance. In that day and a half he had, at least so far as human emotion can be reckoned, tasted the wild joy of winning a fortune and the desperate horror of losing it; he had seen his father's life-work reach its culminating point amid the praises, the acclamations of all the world; and he had seen his father's end. He lay upstairs stiff and cold, his eyes closed; he would never know now — or perhaps he did know — of Valentine's work or that he had misjudged his son, underestimated his capacity; he would never have the chance of making up for the years of harshness, of failing to understand. . . . Valentine shook himself. To think in that way was folly. His father had judged him by what he saw, and who was to say that he was wrong. Likely enough he himself was most to blame for that lack of mutual sympathy that had gone so far to cloud both their lives. If only he had other interests; if only he had tried more to understand his father, to make things clear! And yet

he had tried. He could n't think that the fault was largely his. But he had loved his father. He realised now how much he had counted on being able to break down in the conversation he had intended to force on this very day the barrier of misunderstanding that divided them.

"Well, all that's finished now," he said to himself with a heavy sigh, and rising, went to the window, drew the curtain and looked out on the crumbling wall of the Abbey garden. It was in his father's room that he had been sitting, the little room in which Mr. Barat wrote and worked when he was at home. The maid had left a fire there against her master's return. He looked round the walls and marked the things that all his life he had associated with his father, and that, since as a child he had been forbidden the room and since he had grown up he had never been encouraged to enter it, he had seen so seldom. Some of them he touched with nervous fingers. He would have to open all those drawers, to go through the contents of all the boxes and portfolios. The leather case that held all the Leicester Square plans and drawings, the confidential specifications and notes, lay on top of the desk. It was always locked. Valentine tried to open it — perhaps his father, now that the Palace of Empire was accomplished, would no longer have seen the same need for secrecy, for reticence. No, it was still locked. The key, he know, was upstairs on the chain which was still on his father's body. All these things he'd have, no doubt, to examine. Thank Heaven there was no hurry. And as a matter of fact he did n't even know in what shape his father had left his affairs.

He had been told very clearly, of course, that it had been his father's intention to leave him well provided for, but there was no knowing how the will was drawn. It was more than possible, it was probable even, that his father had carried his distrust of his seriousness and of his ability to the length of tying up all that he had to leave. In that case there would be less unhappy work for him to do. Some one else, no doubt, would have the duty of examining all that the dead man had left behind him.

It was four o'clock now and soon the sky would be lightening. Valentine took a candle — it was one of Mr. Barat's idiosyncrasies to allow neither gas nor electricity on the upper floors of the old house in which he lived — and went upstairs. He paused at the door of his father's bedroom, and then, after a moment of hesitation, entered. In his death Mr. Barat's face had the same sad severity that it had carried in his lifetime, but the lines were softened. Valentine stood and looked down and thought how much happier, how much fuller his life would have been if he had been able to pierce through that iron reserve. He took his father's cold, stiff hand in his own and then he bent down and kissed his father's face. It was, as far as memory told him, the first time in his life that his lips had touched him.

CHAPTER IX

IN WHICH MR. BARAT'S WILL IS READ

THE morning broke full of sad perplexities and anxious work. The maids had slept through all the bringing home of Mr. Barat's body, and Valentine had to tell them what had happened before they could learn it from the Sunday papers. Then a little later pertinacious journalists had to be satisfied with such meagre information as he was able to give them, and Mr. and Mrs. Wilder both arrived and announced that they were going to stop with him for some days, "until everything is over, dear Val," his aunt explained. Came a note, too, from Martin Fahey asking if there was not some way in which he could help, and at eleven a long telegram from Julie Fenelon who had seen what had happened in her Sunday's "Daily Mail," and who offered to come back to London at once if Valentine wished it. The Fenelons had left for Paris by the afternoon train of the previous day.

Luncheon was a melancholy affair. The cook and the parlourmaid seemed both to have lost their heads. The meal was late and ill served. The girl was unused to waiting on any one else than her dead master and his son, and made a sad hash of everything in consequence. Mrs. Wilder, wearing a black dress which showed very much its date of a couple of years ago, looked disapproval

both of her incompetence and of the general household arrangements.

"Do you know, my dear, that this is the first time I've been in this house since your dear mother was carried out of it? It's no use saying anything now, but your poor father was n't much of a one at entertaining—"

Mr. Wilder feared his wife's garrulity might carry her too far, and broke in with all his insurance agent's tact, changing the subject with violence:—

"Your father must have been a rich man, Val. I suppose you don't know how he's left his money?" His inquiry was quite disinterested. If his brother-in-law had left Colin, his nephew, something to remember him by, it certainly would n't come amiss, but the possibility did n't disturb him at all.

"My father told me some time ago that I should be quite well provided for, but that is all I know about it. Perhaps Hunt — his solicitor, you remember — has his will. I thought I'd find out to-morrow."

"You'll hear from Hunt this morning. See if you don't. He lives in town and he'll have seen the news in the paper. He'll be round directly. If you'd got a telephone he'd have rung you up before this."

The day wore away with that curious alternation of matters of fact, almost of forgetfulness, and of hushed depression which so often marks the life of dwellers in homes where the dead lie. Mr. Wilder told Valentine what to do and helped him to do it. Sure enough at five o'clock Mr. Hunt was announced. There is a business-like efficiency about the average solicitor at such a

moment which far more than any conventional consolation assists the bereaved to an attitude of resignation.

"I thought you would wish to see me to-day, Mr. Barat, so I came at once without waiting any summons. And I have brought your father's will. He altered it a couple of months ago, made certain alterations in your favour, I may add." He paused and looked at Valentine and at Mr. and Mrs. Wilder as if to ask whether he was at liberty to proceed or whether his young client would rather see him alone.

"Go on, Mr. Hunt. Speak quite frankly before my uncle and aunt. They are here to help me and I should like them to know everything."

"As a matter of fact I have very little to say, Mr. Barat, — it is sad to have to call you by that name, — and the reading of the will itself will take less than a minute. Your father wrote it out before he came to me. All he wanted me to tell him was whether it was in a legal form." He drew out his pocketbook and unfolded a sheet of ordinary notepaper: —

"Here it is. It is written on the paper of this house, is dated the 10th of January, and is witnessed, he told me, by two of the maids. But I'll read it. 'To my son Valentine Barat I bequeath all my property of any and every kind, but should he predecease me I bequeath all my property to the Royal Institute of British Architects, imposing, however, in this latter case two conditions, the first being that the Institute shall arrange to publish in the most suitable form, without consideration of cost and for free distribution among the members of the Institute and the architectural libraries of Eng-

land and America, a collection of one hundred reproductions in photogravure of photographs of the chief buildings designed by the late Charles F. McKim, of America, and the second being that it shall endow a biennial travelling scholarship of not less than four hundred pounds a year to be known as the Harvey Barat Scholarship, which I wish to be considered as giving its holder an opportunity of studying, to begin with, the existing architecture of Greece and Rome, and then specially the architecture of the United States with particular reference to old Colonial and to the most modern work.””

Mr. Hunt stopped and looked at his hearers, awaiting some comment. Valentine had none to make, nor had his uncle, but Mrs. Wilder had less discretion:—

“I think it very strange that my brother-in-law passed over his relations in that way—I mean, of course, in the event of Valentine having died first. It is very ungrateful, too, —”

“Oh, come, come, Maria: we have n’t anything to complain about. We’ve got plenty of our own, and anyhow, Val is here and as large as life. It would n’t have made it any better if the will had said that the remainder, if Valentine had died, should go to Colin, say.”

“I dare say not, John, but —”

“Tush, tush, Maria, we won’t talk about it. And I’m very glad, Val, you have all there is without any conditions that might tie you up and worry you.”

And Valentine was glad, too, — glad for another reason: he thought that he could take his father’s action in saddling him with no trustees, with no sort of control,

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as some sign that he was becoming more willing to trust him. That surely was what Mr. Hunt had meant when he'd said that certain alterations had been made in his favour.

"How was the will altered, Mr. Hunt, from its predecessor? Can you tell me?"

"Oh, yes; that was practically the same. The alteration in effect was that your father gave you in the superseded will two trustees, Mr. Wilder here and myself, until you were thirty years old."

Mrs. Wilder broke in again: "There, I'm glad that you were recognised in some way anyhow, John."

Her husband was more practical. "Do you know about what the estate comes to and what, outside the business, most of the money is in, Hunt?"

The solicitor's face fell a little. "Yes, I know very well. Very few questions of the kind are more easy to answer. Every penny your father could scrape together, Mr. Barat, he put into the shares, debenture, preference, and ordinary, of the Palace of Empire. He sold out everything he'd got for the purpose. I remonstrated with him, not because I objected to the venture or distrusted it, but because I don't believe in all a man's eggs going into the same basket. But he would n't listen to me. He said it was his duty to back his own project, his own opinion. I hope he'll prove right. He had ten thousand pounds' worth of ordinary shares in his own name, and in the debenture and preference shares he had eighty thousand pounds in my name and that of one of my clerks. That's what the estate amounts to save for what he happens to have on current account at

his bank and the money that's in the business in Great George Street. And it is n't a bad showing, either, Mr. Barat, if you'll allow me to say so; and no one can complain of the way the Palace of Empire shapes after yesterday, now can they, Mr. Wilder?"

Mr. Wilder thought not, but hazarded the opinion that Mr. Hunt had been right when he counselled his brother-in-law not to put all his money into one venture. "Still, it's all right, Val. You can sell out some of the shares and make money by it. All three sorts are at a premium."

"I shan't do that, uncle; not because I don't value your advice, for indeed I do, but because I'm sure my father would think it disloyal. Mr. Hunt said he thought it was his duty to back his own project, his own opinion. If it was, then it's my duty, too."

"Well spoken, Val. I would n't want to persuade you against your will in such a matter."

Fresh tea was brought now for Mr. Hunt, and the conversation became less particular. A little later the solicitor expressed a wish to be allowed to see his old client, and then, wearing a becoming expression of regret, took his farewell. "I shall be at your office tomorrow morning, Mr. Barat. There are several things to do."

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH VALENTINE RAISES A THOUSAND POUNDS AND MR. LEVERTON FORDYCE IS CLEARED OUT OF THE WAY

THE “things to do” of which Mr. Hunt had spoken were none of them, in the simple circumstances of the case, very troublesome.

On going to his own room overnight and opening his desk, Valentine had had brought back to him with very much of a shock all that had happened on the previous Friday. He was n’t worried any longer at his disappointment; indeed, he could n’t bring himself back into the frame of mind in which that had seemed to him serious, — after all, he ’d never had the money, so he ’d never lost it, — but he now remembered almost for the first time the troubles which had faced him in the previous week. There under his hand was the little pile of cheques so neatly written out for all his tradesmen, patient and impatient, and they reminded him of Mr. Leverton Fordyce, whom he had four days to satisfy and to whom, he recalled now with a start, he ’d written promising to go in the morning and to pay off the whole amount represented by the outstanding bills. He would n’t be able to do that as things had turned out. And yet, would n’t he? Perhaps it might be possible. He was sole heir.

Mr. Hunt was able to advise him as to the various

steps he should take with regard to the business in Great George Street. Luckily Mr. Barat had been the sole partner; no one else's interests had to be considered. Valentine and the solicitor walked round to see the manager of the bank in which both the Bellew and Barat account and his father's own private account were kept, and it was an easy matter to arrange that, pending the proving of Mr. Barat's will and the general legalisation of the position, Valentine as the heir should be at liberty to draw on a new account up to any reasonable amount. The manager had every reason to respect Mr. Barat's son. Bellew and Barat had never given any trouble: both the firm and Mr. Barat himself kept always an adequate, a more than adequate, balance.

"There's a balance on the firm's account of eleven hundred pounds odd, Mr. Barat, and on your father's of nearly four-fifty — here, I'll write down the exact sums. There are never any bills accepted for either account, and we have no standing charges, so you can know to a pound where you stand. But about this new temporary drawing account. How much shall we say you can go to?"

That was a question that Valentine did n't want to discuss in Mr. Hunt's presence. The solicitor would smell a rat, to put it vulgarly, if his young client asked for any but a modest credit. And he must arrange for enough to cover at once the amount of Mr. Fordyce's bills. He thought quickly, and looked at his watch: —

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Spencer. I'll come in again to-morrow and settle that if I may. We know the facts now, anyway, and I have an appointment."

It was n't true that Valentine had an appointment, unless his promised visit to the money-lender came under that head. He did n't like having fallen back on a subterfuge, but the need was pressing and not after all so discreditable. It was essential that he should clear Mr. Fordyce out of the way. His father's money was his now; there could be no impropriety in his paying off this unsatisfactory obligation at the first possible moment. And surely there was no necessity to tell his father's solicitor about it.

Valentine found Mr. Leverton Fordyce expecting him and he also found him quite inexorable on the subject of the bills outstanding. His "client" might take them up now or not just as he pleased. But he'd have to pay just the same in either case. Mr. Fordyce knew very well that Valentine was an only child; it was pretty certain he was his father's heir; it was n't likely in that case, he'd ever come up his stairs again. Why, therefore, show him any consideration? Nothing was to be gained by it.

"Very well, Mr. Fordyce: I dare say you're within your rights, but all the same I should have thought that for the good name of your profession it would pay you to be less harsh."

For one instant Mr. Leverton Fordyce ceased to be the gentlemanly financier that long practice had enabled him to appear. Hearing Valentine's words he made a droll grimace, screwed up his mouth, spat into the fire, and winked.

"Come, come, Mr. Barat, you know, and I know that you know, that this is n't a 'profession,' and that

anyhow it ain't got any credit. Credit be blowed; it's our clients who have to have the credit. We've just jolly well got to get all we can out of it while we can, so good-day to you." Valentine had turned to go, and his hand was on the door, when the money-lender paused suddenly, and then began again — "Oh, yes, I was forgetting. I'll make a deduction of ten pounds on the amount to be paid if you do take up all the bills to-morrow and if you'll enlighten my curiosity. What I want to know is, how was it that you were in a position to write to me the letter you did on Friday night saying you'd call to-day and arrange all the bills when your father did n't die till Saturday and could n't even have been very ill — for he was at that banquet. I know it's all right, of course, but I am curious, and I'm willing to pay for my curiosity."

Valentine waited until Mr. Fordyce had finished, satisfied himself that the sentence was at an end, and then, without another word, turned on his heel. He'd see the money-lender damned first, he said to himself.

Mr. Spencer, the bank manager, knowing as he did the likely needs of Bellew and Barat in the way of immediate cash and calculating them at a few pounds, was a little difficult to manage. He was, however, loath to be unaccommodating or to run the risk of offending a good customer. Still a thousand pounds was a thousand pounds. It was no less a sum that Valentine had to ask for. Not only was Mr. Leverton Fordyce waiting to be satisfied, but he'd had to deplete his own banking account by sending Mr. Wiseman a cheque for forty-five pounds.

"Well, Mr. Barat, if you must have a thousand pounds you must have it, I suppose. I don't suppose you're going to throw it away. You want it in notes, you say. But being older than you I wish I knew what you wanted it for so that we might see if the need could n't be postponed."

"That's just it, Mr. Spencer: I can't very well tell you. I want the money to pay off a considerable obligation that's been hanging over my head for a long time and that it is very much to my advantage to settle now. If my father had lived I should have arranged it differently. . . ." His sentence tailed off feebly. But as he got his thousand pounds it did n't very much matter, and Mr. Spencer had no further reason for suspecting his young client's business acumen.

Valentine did n't trust himself to take the notes round to Mr. Leverton Fordyce's office in person. He was, for some reason that he could n't quite justify, too angry with the money-lender. He sent the exact sum by a boy messenger and waited in his club for his return with the cancelled acceptances.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH VALENTINE DISCOVERS HIS FATHER'S HUMANITY

TWO days later Mr. Barat followed his wife to Golder's Green, and more than ever it was borne in on Valentine that he was alone in the world, the master of his own life, his own destiny. His aunt and uncle returned with him to Great College Street and announced that they would stay with him till Monday. "And then, Val, I hope you'll go away for a while; you'll want a rest and change and you'd come back from a week or two at Harrowgate or Eastbourne so much more fit to settle into all your new duties."

Valentine, whose one idea in that connection was that he might possibly be able to run across for a few days to Paris to see Julie, to get Mrs. Fenelon's approval of his suit, and to talk over with both of them the change in his fortune and his prospects, demurred to his aunt's suggestion. He would, if the truth were told, have preferred to be left alone. He wanted time to think, to accommodate himself to all that was different in his surroundings and the attitude of the world. His heart was still heavy; the wound of his loss was in no way healing; he missed more and more that father who had been so little a father to him. His nights, and his days, too, when he was alone, were taken up with vain longings for the

past, questionings, regrets. If only he had known that his father was to go so soon.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilder looked at him, nodded significantly at one another, and were feebly soothing. They thought their presence would help him, and also they found that a little stay so near the centre of things was rather convenient after a winter in Chislehurst. Mrs. Wilder liked being within reach of the shops.

Monday came and Valentine at last was alone. He had rejected his aunt's suggestion that Colin should take up his residence at Great College Street for a while, Colin who was now a clerk in a stockbroker's office, whose once smooth face was decorated with an orderly moustache and whose pink skin was a sallow brown. Of course he, too, would have found Westminster convenient. But Valentine wanted no companionship. For the present he desired nothing but the opportunity to brood undisturbed on what he had lost and on what he must do.

A dozen times he had paused on the threshold of his father's room, and had turned back, putting off that sad hour when he must begin the examination of all that his father had left, his papers, the old boxes, the desk. But to-night after dinner the duty could no longer be decently evaded. His father had been dead for more than a week. Valentine might well find that many things would need attending to. He had been sitting in the drawing-room and he rang the bell for the maid:—

“I am going upstairs directly and I do not want to be disturbed. Light the fire at once, please, in Mr. Barat's — in my father's room, and light all the candles, too.”

He was slow, however, to begin his task, and even when he did move it was at first to go to his own room. He hated this duty, hated the feeling that it gave him of prying into some one else's concerns. Not that he expected to find anything that his dead father would wish hidden, but . . . The idea of turning over all his father's papers was one against which all his instincts cried out. And so he postponed the beginning and went to his own desk and trifled with his own letters, destroyed with a sigh that letter he had written to his father which was to have been delivered to him on the morning after the opening of the Palace of Empire, the letter which was to settle his future. There were his plans, too, the useless roll of plans and drawings at which he had worked for so many months — all, all quite vain now. He would burn them — no, the fire was unlighted. He tore them up one by one, not daring to look at them again, determined that no eye should see his stupid folly. And then, finding no further excuse for delay, he turned and went to his father's room.

Everything was exactly as Mr. Barat had left it. Nothing had been moved. It was as if he might come in at any moment. There was his chair where he usually sat, and his pens and his blotting paper mathematically arranged. Everything was in order. On the desk stood his mother's photograph and Valentine lifted and looked at it. Would things have been different if she had lived?

For minutes he stood doing nothing and then his first movement was to that leather case in which had been kept through years of work the plans and drawings of the Leicester Square buildings. Valentine had tried

to open it on the night of his father's death but had found it locked. Now the key was in his hand. It was a kind of necessary sacrilege on which he was embarked, but curiosity had some part in his mind. Perhaps the drawings were no longer there, but if they were he would like to see them, to see how his father had treated, had overcome, this and that difficulty on which he had himself worked in so futile a fashion.

The key turned. Yes, there the plans were, all neatly folded and docketed, and with them the sheets of drawings and the pages of specifications and all the details as to calculation, quantities, stresses, strains. Valentine carried them across to the large table which ran down one side of the room, unfolded and looked at paper after paper. His architect's heart leapt with joy at the sight of such work, and that his father had planned it all and had carried it through filled him with pride. For hours he sat there examining a hundred details, putting off to the last what he knew would be the greatest pleasure of all, the drawings and the details bearing on the great tower, that glorious soaring pinnacle that would alone have made Mr. Barat's building famous through the world. The English papers were never tired of pointing out that it exceeded by a score of feet the height of the tallest of New York's wonders.

Certainly from the point of view of the young and curious architect it was the tower and its problems that had the most fascination of all the parts of that huge edifice that Mr. Barat had dreamed and carried into being. The night was young yet, and Valentine after a while swept on one side the other papers and covered

the table with the drawings and sheets that dealt with this one great feature of the Palace of Empire. It more than anything else had touched the imagination of the man in the street, fired his pride in London's possession of so vast a building, and more than anything else had considerations of the way in which it had been built occupied both the lay and the technical papers. On such matters Mr. Barat had been far from communicative. Mr. Cowperthwayte Johnson had tried in vain to get from him arresting details, entertaining statistics. "They've got the result; what need is there for the public to bother with the processes?" the architect had replied.

And now all the facts were under Valentine's hand. Not so had he intended to spend the evening, but now he could n't refrain from taking up point after point in the tower's construction, tracing out lovingly, with all the zeal of artist and craftsman, detail after detail. How had this been achieved? How had that been assured? In what way had these enormous weights been carried through safely to the ground without the sacrifice of the beauty, the grace, of the whole building over which the tower soared with such apparent lightness and ease? His admiration, his reverence, for his father's work grew as he mastered all the complex processes. He was architect enough to anticipate the difficulties and to recognise the splendid ingenuity which had gone to their overcoming. After a time — many hours having passed — he came to the discovery that his father had centred all the chief problems of the weight and the outward thrust of the walls of the tower on one huge concealed arch which lay embedded in the centre of the building

itself, the hidden legs of a colossus. Mathematically, he saw, there was nothing to make such a solution impossible granted the ingenuity which could conceive such a plan. Science found the way to translate into secure and certain substance the artist's vision.

And it was obvious that on this question Mr. Barat had had to lavish most of his care. The papers showed alternative schemes and were so arranged that it was no difficult matter to trace the evolution step by step through which his gropings had led him before he arrived at the end and method that he judged satisfactory. Architect's curiosity led Valentine to go through each detail, to check all the figures. As he worked the idea sprang up in his head that he would raise yet another monument to his father's fame by reproducing in an exact and loving facsimile all these carefully arranged plans and drawings and calculations, that all the world that could understand might realise how great a spirit had spent itself on this storehouse of the empire's life. . . .

The night passed on and Valentine still sat bent over his work. He was glad now that his father had never seen his own foolish, impotent attempts to grapple with these same problems. They seemed to him now a mere passing of the time, a beating of the air. It was nearly four o'clock when he came to the paper and working drawing to which he had most looked forward, the two documents which would show him exactly the method and strength of the arch on which so to speak the whole Palace of Empire depended. How light it looked for such a duty, how graceful, how strong, and yet again

how light. He followed each calculation through, checking the figures for his own delight till he came to the last figures of all, the figures of that part of the structure on which everything else depended, towards which all the strains converged. How crystal clear all his father's calculations were. . . .

Valentine had started in his seat; even under the candlelight he had paled.

Surely what he had found was impossible, unthinkable. He drew out a clean sheet and started the last set of calculations afresh for himself, giving a double care to each separate stage. He bit his lips and the hand that held his pencil shook. . . . Yes, it was true.

But somewhere there must be a mistake. He had forgotten some elementary rule in the working-out of such problems. He searched his memory, but could find no lapse.

He rose. There was one way in which he could make certain. He had now the key of the office which his father had always carried. It would take him but a few minutes to walk round to Great George Street and to find the book which would tell him if he had erred.

Abingdon Street and Palace Yard were wet and wind-swept as Valentine made his way through by the Abbey to Great George Street. At such an hour Dean's Yard is closed and the longer route gave more time for thought. Driven clouds hurried over a starlit sky, and as he came out on to the space before Westminster Hall he could see towering over London the shaft of his father's building silhouetted against the vague darkness. He looked

at it now with new eyes, his mind terrified with his discovery, his nerves awry. What if his suspicion, his more than suspicion, were confirmed? How should he do his duty? How should he tear down what his father had given all the proud years of his life to build up?

"It's all right, constable; I belong here," he had had to explain to the prowling guardian of the night who flashed his bull's-eye on the door just as Valentine sought to enter the office. By so much more were his nerves jangled. Quickly he went to his room and tore from the shelf a book which would tell him at once whether there had been some flaw in his own calculations, some basic error in the checking which, quite idly to begin with, he had given to his father's figures. . . .

The book showed him that the right was his, the error his father's.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH LORD BUTTERY SHOWS THAT NOBLESSE DOES NOT ALWAYS OBLIGE

IT was broad daylight when Valentine let himself into his house. The maids were up, the house swept and ready for him. The lamp which he had left in his father's room had burnt itself out. The table and the floor were still littered with the plans and papers which that leather case had held, that leather case which now he looked at with loathing, as if it were in itself responsible for his discovery, as if it had tempted him to his undoing, as if had he resisted curiosity as to its contents his father's secret would have been safe.

But Valentine was no fool. Where he had been, what he had done, since he had, a moment after he made certain that he had not been wrong, let himself out again into Great George Street, he never knew. In an agony of mind he had sought the river and the idea of ending everything there and then had passed temptingly through his brain. But his common sense and his sense of duty had banished the thought.

Now he was calm again. He saw his duty clearly before him. His must be the hand to destroy all that his father had built up, that father who even in the week since he had died had become an idol in his heart and to whose memory he had unconsciously vowed all the work of his life. The facts were so plain. He went over them

again in his own mind: there was no room for error now; no room for question as to what he must do.

Valentine ate no breakfast; he swallowed a cup of strong tea with difficulty and then rang for the maid: —

“Whistle me a taxi at once, please, and let it wait.”

It took him but a couple of minutes to write the letter which he must send: —

DEAR LORD BUTTERY, — I must see you on a matter of urgent, of the most vital, business. Will you tell me by the bearer of this where to find you, and when? Please let it be within an hour. You may be sure that I would not disturb you in this peremptory manner if I had any choice. Very sincerely yours,

VALENTINE BARAT.

And now depression settled like a pall on his spirits. He had n’t the horrid habit of biting his nails, but he bit them now. There was nothing for him but despair. Everything was ended; everything he had hoped for, all that he had pictured for the future, had come toppling down about his ears. . . .

He looked at the morning’s paper, and tossed it aside, at his watch and calculated that if Lord Buttery was at home he should have an answer to his note within a quarter of an hour. And then — well, he would have to go through with it, cost what it might; and in the afternoon he ought to go and see Julie and to tell her everything, and release her. How could he hold her now? What possible future could he offer her? Practically every penny he had was locked up in the Palace of

Empire. Exactly how much of his fortune was in the debentures of the company he did n't know. Presumably that sum, whatever it was, he could manage to save intact, but his mind had seen each aspect of his position, had seen it in its worst light, and he was sure that his duty as his father's son was to sacrifice his debenture claims for the sake of all the other shareholders. He remembered how keen Sir Edward Drakelow had been to attract the small investor, and how efficient Mr. Cowperthwayte Johnson's efforts had been to that end. He saw a thousand families ruined through his father's error. He knew that he must do what little he could towards reparation. It was so little, a mere flea-bite.

And so he paced the room, prey to doubts, victim of circumstances for which, although he had no responsibility he must eternally atone.

The taxi drew up at the door and an answer to his note was brought him. Yes, Lord Butterby was at home and his secretary was bidden to say that he would see Mr. Valentine Barat at once if he would come to Great Cumberland Place.

It was the first time that Valentine had been in Lord Butterby's house. At this early hour it had a cold, an unwelcoming look. It had no air of being lived in. "His lordship will see you in a very few minutes," he was informed by a servant from whom it would appear that every trace of common humanity had been extracted by some process known only to the inhabitants of Mayfair and the adjacent regions, and he was handed the "Morning Post" as if to say that "a very few min-

utes" might easily mean a full half-hour. It did n't, however. The agony that Valentine found it quite impossible to forget even for a moment in the reading of what seemed to him perfectly irrelevant foreign intelligence of a very important nature was not in this stage at least to be protracted. The desiccated personage reappeared and Valentine was conveyed to an upper floor, where he found his host in his shirt-sleeves and an excellent humour engaged in giving instructions to his valet as to the clothes he should want.

"If your letter had come an hour or two later, it'd have missed me. I'm going to Wales at eleven for a couple of days and then I'm off to the South. But what is this 'vital business' that won't brook of any delay? You're not very like your father, Mr. Barat. That was n't his way. And what a loss his death is. I feel as if I'd lost a friend." He nodded sympathetically but without depth of feeling. "And England has n't so many architects that she can lightly lose her greatest."

Valentine had no time to talk of his father's virtues. Lord Butterby looked as if he was in a hurry. And assuredly what he had to say wanted saying quickly.

"Lord Butterby, it is about my father I wanted to see you. I want you, please, to listen to me patiently. I shall not take very long. My father left me his sole heir — heir to between eighty and a hundred thousand pounds" — Lord Butterby looked at him with a fresh interest on hearing such large sums mentioned — "all of which is in Palace of Empire shares. I tell you that in order that you may see that all my interests are identical with your own. Let that pass, however. As his heir and

executor it fell to me, of course, to go through his papers, and among other things I came to the case that in his life he always so jealously guarded, the case that contained all the drawings, plans, specifications, and so on, for the building. My father was peculiar. He took no one into his confidence, his professional confidence. I don't think any one ever saw, except quite cursorily, the papers as a whole until I went through them last night. Now I'm an architect myself. I care for architecture more than anything else, and when I had those papers before me I could n't help going through them page by page, out of professional curiosity partly, and partly because of my pride in my father's work. I dare say you can understand. Anyhow, I came at last to the drawings and papers that dealt with the tower. That's the part of the building that is most interesting to an architect, just as it is to the man in the street."

Valentine paused for a moment; his voice was a little shaken and uneven. Lord Butterby was n't a bad, but he was n't a helpful, listener. He did n't look as if he thought that anything this young man had to say was likely to be important.

"I wanted, as any one else would, to learn how my father had contrived it. It was all very plainly drawn and set out. I could, and did, follow every stage. I was able to check one by one all the calculations. The most important question was as to how all that immense weight was carried down through the building itself to the ground. It seemed that it rested on what was in effect a huge arch, which the casual observer, or, indeed, any one but an architect who thoroughly knew his job,

would never suspect, so cleverly was it hidden, screened by the buildings below. Everything depended on that arch, the stability of the tower and the safety of the whole building itself. A defect in the arch would, unless and until it could be corrected, imperil all the work."

"Well?" Lord Butterby was interested now.

Valentine paused at the interruption and bit the knuckle of his forefinger. He spoke slowly: "Lord Butterby, I found a defect in the tower —"

"Yes, yes — a defect, perhaps, but it is n't dangerous; it can be corrected —"

"No, it can't, Lord Butterby. It's a defect in the very planning of the tower. My father made a hideous error in working out the necessary strength for the arch which supported it. The error was simple enough. There's no difficulty in the veriest layman understanding it. He just forgot to multiply a certain figure by two. He was n't well. We know now. He was morbidly anxious to let no one assist him except in the mere details. He refused to let me or any one else in his office into his secrets. I suppose it was part of the disease that killed him. The doctors said it was all the result of nerve strain, you'll remember. Anyhow, there it is. The tower is standing now. I saw it as I came. But it may come down at any minute. It must come down. Nothing, no power on earth, can keep it standing for long. There is no way in which it can be strengthened. The error lies in its very heart. So far it's stood, no doubt by some miracle of equilibrium —"

"Who else have you told this to? You say you only found it out last night."

"I've told it to no one. I have been certain of it only within the last six hours. I came at once to you."

"Well, we'll allow, Mr. Barat, for the moment at least, that you are not deceived. What exactly does it mean? The tower may come down some time or other, you say. I suppose that if it is necessary — and I lay stress on the 'if' — we can take it down. Architects are so clever. What they have put up they can take down, — eh? We need n't disturb the rest of the building. And, after all, the tower's more an ornament than anything else."

Valentine shook his head. "I don't want you to take what I say as certain, Lord Buttery. My experience is limited. But I don't think that the tower can come down in that way. All its lower part is embedded in the rest of the building. It's so much a part of the whole. I am sure in my own mind that it means that in effect the whole centre of the building must be sacrificed."

His host went to the fireplace and rang the bell. "Bring a couple of brandy-and-sodas — no, one will do; no, bring a syphon and the decanter." Valentine had refused a drink of any sort.

Nothing was said until the servant had come and gone. Lord Buttery poured out for himself a very stiff allowance of brandy, and, adding the least possible amount of soda, drank it off at a gulp. "I wanted that," he said, with a sigh of relief. "And now, Mr. Barat, let me see if I understand you. What you want me to believe is that your father, an experienced architect with a lifetime of work behind him, so far forgot all that he had learned that when he came to take the most

important step of his whole career he made a ghastly mistake, the kind of mistake an amateur might make, and that it was n't discovered because he was jealous of interference and supervision and allowed no one to check his work, his calculations. Have I got it right so far?"

"I'm afraid so, Lord Butterby, and —"

"No, hold hard. And then you want me to believe that the mistake is irrevocable, that it's so serious that it can't be corrected; and that, as a consequence, practically the whole of his building is doomed; that not only the tower itself must come down, may indeed come down about our ears, but that its existence is so bound up with that of the building around and about it that with the part the whole must go. Is that so?"

Valentine nodded.

"Well, that being so, Mr. Barat, what exactly is it that you propose that I should do?" Lord Butterby looked at Valentine, and waited.

"I — I really don't know, Lord Butterby. I thought that you would know what steps should be taken. Something should be done at once —"

"Yes, I see; 'something should be done at once.' But what? Surely you who have lived with these facts for six hours have made up your mind what that something is."

"I think that people should be told."

"People should be told'! Forgive me, Mr. Barat, but I can't help smiling. Who should be told? And how? You don't answer me. You don't know." He looked at his watch. "I'll tell you what I propose to do. I shall postpone my going away until this afternoon and

I shall see one or two of my colleagues. I shall tell them what you've told me and I shall hear what they have to say. You may be wrong — ”

“But, indeed, Lord Buttery, I'm not wrong. Any architect will tell you.”

“Yes, I dare say, but I'm not going to ask any architect, at present, anyhow. Myself, I think that if you are not mistaken about the facts you are certainly mistaken about their seriousness. Why, was n't there something of this very kind at Tree's Theatre a year or two ago? Did n't they discover the proscenium arch had a flaw in it, and that it might come down, might have come down, at any moment? It had n't come down, though. And they put that right, did n't they? I dare say you have n't thought what all this business would mean to the Palace of Empire, to us all, to you.”

“I have. I know it means the ruin of the whole project.”

“Well, I don't mean to take any step without thought. Perhaps you'd have me hurry round to the secretary's office and tell him to give notice to every tenant in the place that the tower may come crashing through his ceiling at any moment, and that he'd better clear out while there's time. Is that what you want?”

“Yes — well, Lord Buttery, I am sure that something ought to be done. But you know best how to do it.”

“There you are again with your ‘something ought to be done.’ And, as a matter of fact, something shall be done. I am going to see Sir Edward Drakelow, who was nearest to your father in all this scheme. We'll talk it over, he and I. You in the mean time should go

home and rest. You don't look well. I have an idea you are overwrought. It would be quite natural, I am sure."

"But, Lord Butterby, how can I rest? Why, at any moment the thing might happen. Think what it would mean. Think of the loss of life. No, no, I must act."

Lord Butterby rose and walked across to Valentine and patted him on the shoulder. "Look here, my dear boy, I am old enough to be your father; go home, rest, keep your mouth shut, and I'll promise you you shall hear from Sir Edward Drakelow in the morning. I'm going to discuss with him the best course to adopt. But keep your mouth shut as I've said. Panic never did any one any good. Your father would n't have given way to panic."

The touch of Lord Butterby's hand on his shoulder and the mention of his father went to calm Valentine's spirit. It was time. Hysteria would soon have worked its will on him.

"Very well, Lord Butterby, I shall do as you say." He got up and held out his hand. His host took it.

"I shall see you again, Mr. Barat. I trust — I hope — that things are not as bad as you think. But in any case you can depend on me."

Directly Valentine was gone Lord Butterby sank into an easy-chair and helped himself to another brandy-and-soda. "Phew! I wonder how much there is in what he says. He believes it all, that's clear. And evidently he's no fool. I suppose it's possible. And if he's right, where should I be?" He appeared to think deeply for a few minutes and then turned to his desk, on which a telephone stood: —

"Give me Bank 4343. . . Is that Wilcox and Staines? Is Mr. Staines there? . . . Look here, Staines, I think the Palace shares are high enough. I think they're too high. Why should they be at that premium? Sell ten thousand of mine at once; but sell 'em cautiously, mind. I don't want it said I'm selling. What's that? Don't I believe in them? Of course I do. But I don't see why they should be so high. There's bound to be a bit of a reaction now all the shouting's over. I can buy them back again then. Very well, good-bye."

A little ashamed of himself, Lord Butterby rang the bell and told his servant that he'd be taking a later train. "I'm going into the city to see Sir Edward Drakelow. Telephone and tell him I'm on the way."

CHAPTER XIII

AND SIR EDWARD DRAKELOW SHOWS HE'S MADE OF
THE SAME MATERIAL

LORD BUTTERY was as good as his word. Indeed, Valentine heard from Sir Edward Drakelow even earlier than he had been promised. He received a note, a curt note, on the very evening of his interview with the Chairman of the Palace of Empire Limited, in which Sir Edward said that he would be glad if Mr. Barat would find it convenient to come to see him at eleven o'clock the next morning at the offices of the Phoenix Line in Threadneedle Street on the matters which he had discussed with Lord Butterby.

Sir Edward received him with a businesslike coldness. "Sit there, Mr. Barat. I do not think we need take up a great deal of one another's time. Lord Butterby has told me what you said to him yesterday, so there is no necessity to go over it again. I have taken some advice; I have thought over the whole matter very deeply, and I have decided to do — nothing."

"But, Sir Edward —"

"I do not think there is any 'but' about it. In fact, I am sure there is n't. Your father was an experienced architect, a very great architect. You are an architect yourself, they tell me. You'll forgive me saying, though, that you have n't much experience. Yet you want us to

take your mere opinion against all your father's experience. Your book learning tells you, if I understand the matter aright, that your father did n't allow enough margin in calculating the weight of the tower. Frankly, I think, young sir, that you have discovered a mare's nest. It does you credit, since you believe in it, that you went at once to Lord Butterby and told him what you thought — but, well —"

And Sir Edward threw up his hands. As, however, everything he was saying had been a matter of anxious calculation, and as everything depended on his being able so to impress himself on his young hearer that the matter would be dropped once and for all, he did n't pause long enough to allow Valentine to interpose. He went on:—

"I said I had taken advice. I have — from a very high authority, although I am not at liberty to disclose his name. I am told that it is inconceivable that your father should not have known his own business, that it's ridiculous to suppose he would have made such a mistake as you attribute to him. And the fact remains, too, that the tower is there, has been there for months and months, and that it shows no signs of coming down. There it is and there it'll stop till we are all of us dead and forgotten. The name of Barat will never be forgotten, though. The tower and the whole building have insured your father's immortality. Shall I tell you what I think, Mr. Barat? I believe that your loss, altogether unexpected as it was, was a very great shock to you, — it was a shock, to all of us, — and that it's upset you more than you know. It's not to be wondered at, I'm

sure. You're all unnerved, full of fancies, morbid, overwrought. One does have ideas when one is low. Now take my advice; dismiss the whole matter from your mind if you can; go away and rest or travel for a month. I give you my word that if when you come back you still wish it,— and I am pretty sure you won't,— I'll have a technical inquiry into the whole matter." He looked at Valentine benevolently, radiating a kind of paternal sympathy.

"Sir Edward, I shall not go away, and I shall not rest. Let me tell you quite frankly that if you won't listen to me, if you won't take steps in the matter, I shall have to make the whole thing public in some other way. You are right in saying that I have n't a great deal of experience, but there are some things in architecture as simple, as settled, as the first proposition of Euclid. This is one of them. My father it was who was overwrought. He made the mistake. You run the risk— no, it is a certainty, not a risk — of sacrificing thousands of lives if you do nothing. That tower will come down. When it falls it will destroy the greater part of the building. It must. Think of your responsibility, think of mine, if it fell during the day, or in the evening when the two theatres are full."

The lines of Sir Edward Drakelow's face hardened. Things were not going as he had planned. "Responsibility. That is the right word. I am glad you used it. I *am* responsible. And do you think that if I thought for a moment that there was anything in this story of yours I would rest until every one knew it, until the whole Palace was empty of a soul?" He smiled in what

he hoped was a disarming manner. "But I have another responsibility. Your father is dead, and I more than any one else am concerned in the credit of this whole undertaking. It was I who 'floated' it. I have a responsibility to all the shareholders —"

"I am a shareholder myself to the extent of nearly a hundred thousand pounds and —"

"I hold shares, too, young man, and so does Lord Butterby — but do you suppose that we'd allow our own interests to weigh in the scale? It really comes to this: if I did as you want me to do, I should rush out and proclaim to the whole world what you suspect. Whether it proves true or not, I should look a pretty fool, and indeed I should be one. Without inquiry, without proper thought, I should have taken the opinion of a young man whose practical knowledge of architecture is almost nil. On the strength of that I should have destroyed all my shareholders' property in the Palace, have wasted their millions of pounds just as surely as if I had poured them into the Thames."

"Sir Edward, I know very well that what I am going to do will beggar me, and worse still will destroy forever my father's great work, but I've counted the cost. You argue as if this was a matter that would wait. It won't. Even while we are talking the tower may come down. A storm may spring up to-night and bring it crashing through the roof of the theatre, hotel, and restaurant."

"You talk, young man! How many months has it been erected? Several, anyway. It has n't come down so far, and yet you object to a few days' delay, of inquiry. It has stood for months and months; why, even allowing

that what you say is correct, should n't it be safe for a week or two longer? Can you give me any good reason? Remember, too, that we're coming to the unstormy time of the year."

The question baffled Valentine. It sounded reasonable, but he knew it to be fallacious. If he were willing to wait a week, then why not another week, a month, a year?

"No, Sir Edward. I've thought over already before I came here all the arguments you've used to me. I won't, I can't, take the risk. If you refuse to move, then I must take some other step."

"What step?"

"I shall decide. To tell the truth, it never occurred to me that you'd hesitate for a moment in doing what I was sure was your duty, so that I made no plans."

"Mr. Barat, I think your whole point of view is foolish, but I respect you for holding it. Will you do this? Will you wait for two days? To-day is Wednesday. Give me till Friday at eleven o'clock for my decision."

Valentine rose and took his hat. He disapproved of his own weakness in agreeing to this new proposal, but he hardly saw how he could help it. "Very well, Sir Edward: I shall come back in two days — on Friday at eleven."

"And in the mean time you'll tell no one?"

"I can almost promise that, Sir Edward, but not quite. I shall tell one person, but it is not any one in England, and I can pledge my life that it won't go any further."

"Very well, Mr. Barat. And good-bye for the present."

Sir Edward Drakelow sat back into his chair with what was far from a sigh of relief. He had secured a respite of forty-eight hours, but in effect he had failed in all that he had intended to achieve in his interview with Valentine Barat. He could see that the young man meant what he said, and it seemed to him practically certain that it would be impossible to turn him from his purpose. Well, nothing could be done for a couple of days and to-morrow night he would see Lord Butterby and they could talk the position over. Not that he needed Lord Butterby in council. It was his habit to bend his noble chairman to his own will. But it was essential that in this matter he should at least seem to act after the fullest consideration. If anything untoward should happen — of course it would n't, but if it should — his own position would be so much the stronger if he had n't acted entirely on his own initiative.

CHAPTER XIV

BUT JULIE FENELON EXHIBITS A VERY PROPER SPIRIT

VALENTINE left Threadneedle Street and returned home in a state of mind disillusioned and more than ever depressed. Neither Lord Buttery nor Sir Edward Drakelow had shown the slightest apprehension of the position or sympathy with him in his relation to his father's work. And neither of them would believe that he knew what he was talking about. It was to that disbelief that he attributed their refusal to act. It never occurred to him that any sinister motive was at the back of their minds. He thought of them as incapable rather than vicious.

By the 2.20 train he left for Paris. He had warned Julie by telegram of his arrival directly he had found that for a couple of days he could do nothing. So far he had not written to her of his perplexities, of the horror of his position. He had tried, but the words would n't come. He would tell her, and free her at the same time.

How often he had crossed to Paris, and in how many moods. Never before had he been in a like unhappiness. If only the journey could have been stretched out. On the boat and in the railway carriage he was at least free from everything but his own miserable thoughts. He wished that he were travelling not to Paris but to Berlin

or Buda-Pesth. By so many more hours would the hour of meeting Julie Fenelon be postponed. But Amiens came and Creil and the long green valley near Chantilly and soon the fortifications were reached, and then, with his heart in his mouth, he was in the Gare du Nord. Julie was not on the platform, but he knew that she would be waiting for him in the little knot of people at the barrier, and there she was, smiling at him a little sadly because of his loss, but happy to have him with her again.

Julie knew at once that something had gone wrong. Valentine's lack of response to her affection was n't to be accounted for by the loss of his father. She knew better, however, than to attempt to find out what was amiss by any direct questioning. They drove hand-in-hand but almost in silence to her hotel. Valentine had done his best to dine on the train, and now all they had to do was to sit in the Fenelons' little drawing-room and talk.

"Mamma will be back in about an hour, Valentine; she's gone to one of her bridge-parties; but she said she should leave early so as to see you — just as if we could n't have got on without her for a couple of hours or more." She stopped for a moment to take her hat off, and to arrange her hair before the glass, and then came to Valentine and put her head on his shoulder: —

"You have n't kissed me yet, you old slow-coach. Come, sit here and tell me everything. You poor dear, I have been so unhappy about you. But one thing I am very glad about. I did see your father and I made friends with him. He asked Mamma and me to dine

with him the next time we came to London. I'm sure he saw you were in love with me, Valentine, and I'm sure that he would have been quite pleased if you had told him all about everything. I could see it. Are n't you glad, dear?"

Valentine's answer was little more than a murmur of assent.

"Darling, are n't you glad, too, that as your father had to die now, he yet lived to finish his greatest work, and that he died at the moment of his triumph? Every one, from your king downwards, knew what a great man he was, and there his monument stands built with his own hands. It will keep his memory alive forever."

Julie was turning the knife in her lover's wound, but she was also giving him the opportunity that he had been too nervous to make for himself. He drew her closer to him and took both her hands in his.

"Listen, dear, I have a lot to tell you and it is all very, very unhappy." And then he went on to describe to her all that had happened, all he had passed through in the last couple of days.

Julie listened to him wide-eyed, nestling to him to show her sympathy.

"Of course, dear, you were right in everything, but I don't think you see what they were trying to do. They want to persuade you to do nothing, to convince you that you are very likely wrong. They dare n't face, being cowards, the result of telling every one the truth; and then, too, very likely they are thinking of their own pockets."

"I can't believe that, Julie. They'd be ashamed. It's

impossible that any one should fail in that way. No, they honestly don't believe me."

"Perhaps they are n't sure that you are right, and are gambling on the chance. That's the best you can say for them." Julie's feminine intuition enabled her to see further than did her more confiding lover.

"Well, dear, it does n't affect the issue. I know what I have to do and there is n't any power on earth that will prevent my doing it. But, darling, I don't think you see what it all means."

"Yes, Valentine, I do. It means, as you said, that you yourself, who should cherish your father's memory, are really going to destroy it. But you are doing what he would have wished. He'd be proud of you. Your father was a real man, Valentine dear: I could see that in his eyes. He'd never do a mean thing. Still, not being an architect, I'm not so convinced as you are that the tower will come down. The Tower of Pisa does n't. But that is n't the point. It may come down — to-day or next year or in ten years. It would be criminal not to make the facts known just because the thing may by some chance stand there till its makers are dead. And that is just what Lord Butterby and that other man are thinking of — although they may not acknowledge it even to themselves."

Valentine pulled himself together. He could n't put it off any longer. Poor darling, she did n't seem to understand.

"Julie, darling, I have to tell you something else. Whether I get these men to act, or whether I have to act myself, it's all up with my father's work and with

the Palace of Empire. All the money — or practically all — that's been spent in its building will be lost. Of course the place can be built up again, but it'll cost millions — and people are only too likely to fight shy of it. What my father left me — nearly half a million dollars in your money — is in the shares of the company, part of it being in debentures. That means that, as far as that part is concerned, I have a first claim on the value of the site and so on; but I ought n't to exercise that claim. The people who invested in the shares are going to lose their money through a carelessness of my father's, and I know I ought to extinguish any claim I may have. It's the only way in which I can make up on my father's account. But, dear, it is hard. I was coming over earlier in this very week to get your mother's consent to our engagement — and then I was going to get you to settle the day for our wedding. You see" — he smiled a little — "I felt I could dare to suggest we could set up house on the income of my eighty thousand pounds. And now I have n't got eighty thousand pounds — I've got nothing but the few hundreds that are in the bank, and such money as is owed to my father's firm — another two thousand pounds at the most. I'm almost a beggar, dear, and so —"

Julie Fenelon had wriggled away from Valentine's side and sitting upright had turned to face him. She clapped her little pink hand to his mouth.

"Valentine, Valentine, Valentine! — I don't know what you were going to say but I'm sure it was something very stupid. Cut it out, dear, whatever it was. What you say about the debentures is just like you,

and, as I'm going to be your wife and what is yours will be mine, I hereby tell you that I understand exactly and that I quite agree. You're right enough: it's jolly hard, but that can't be helped. We'd both of us be ashamed if every one else lost his money and you saved a lot of yours. So that's settled."

"But it can't be settled that way, Julie. I can't ask you to be a poor man's w—"

He was stopped again by the same soft palm, and at this very moment the door opened and Mrs. Fenelon appeared.

"Mamma dear, you're just in time. Here's Valentine only just arrived and talking the most dreadful nonsense. When he's said 'How do you do?' to you I'll tell you all about it. . . . Now sit just there, mamma, opposite to us. You are not too close to the fire, are you? Here's a photograph you can use to keep the heat away: it's about the only excuse there is for these monstrous big photographs that every one has nowadays. And here's a footstool. Now are you quite comfortable? Tell me."

"Yes, Julie, my little donkey, but I want to talk to Valentine, not to you. My dear boy"—she bent forward and took his hand—"I was so grieved to hear of your loss. What a shock it must have been to you. Of course I only met your father that once, but I liked him very much. One could n't help liking and trusting a man with such honest, sincere eyes. And you don't look well, Valentine: I wish you could stop here for a little while. I'd take great care of you; I'm a famous nurse. Or have you too much to do?"

That gave Julie her chance. "Valentine has much, much too much to do, Mamma. He's up to his ears in worries. I'll tell you about them after, if he'll let me — although after all they don't affect you at all. He's got to go back to-morrow and to settle all sorts of disagreeable things. But what he's come over for is n't disagreeable. He's too shy to tell you himself, poor fellow, so I'm going to help him out." Valentine tried to interrupt. "Please be quiet, Sir. You've been talking all the evening. It's my turn now. Mamma, he's here to ask you for my hand — that's the right phrase, is n't it? Of course, it's quite unnecessary, but he's nothing if not very English and very correct. Why, if he'd had any eyes, he'd have seen he could have it for the asking a couple of years ago when we first met. You're very pleased, are n't you, Mamma?" And then, before Mrs. Fenelon could get out a word, Julie went on: "And he's come also, having assumed that you would accept him as a future son-in-law, to find out from me when I'd marry him, to get me 'to name the day.' It's March now; April would be too much of a rush; May is unlucky. Valentine, I'll marry you on June 1st if it is n't a Sunday. Now get up and kiss Mamma, and, as I know very well you did n't have any real dinner on that train, we're going round to Viel's for some supper. You're the only one of us who is decently dressed, Mamma, but the place will be empty: we'll be back here before the supper people will be out of their theatres. I insist on celebrating the occasion somehow."

There were some situations with which Valentine

Barat was not equipped to cope. Julie Fenelon had contrived one of them. After much argument, much private talk between the two of them, many demonstrations on his part of how evil was now his case, he succumbed under protest, but with a good grace. He returned to London a very much happier man than he had left it.

CHAPTER XV

IN WHICH LORD BUTTERY AND SIR EDWARD DRAKELOW PUT THEIR HEADS TOGETHER AND DECIDE TO TELL VALENTINE BARAT TO GO TO THE DEVIL

WHAT time Valentine was on his way from Folkestone to London, Lord Butterby and Sir Edward Drakelow in the recesses of the Chairman's mansion were talking over the course of conduct they had better pursue in view of this new development in the fortunes of their enterprise. Sir Edward was feeling his way. He knew what was going to be done, but he was anxious not to appear to be imposing his will on his companion. His policy was obviously to make Lord Butterby suggest a course. He could then agree with complete safety.

"It comes to this, Lord Butterby: we are confronted with a very stubborn, self-opinionated young man. He believes he's discovered this lapse of his father's; he's convinced that it's irremediable; he's determined, so he says, to make it public. But after all, he's little more than a boy" — Sir Edward, deceived by Valentine's appearance of youth, underestimated his age by three or four years — "he's had no experience; he's upset — I think he's got a bee in his bonnet. Now the worst of it is that we cannot disprove what he says — but on the other hand he can't prove it. Unless the place is pulled down the facts can't be known. As I told you, I've

put the case, purely in a problematic way, of course, to a neighbour of mine who's an architect. I led up to it, wrapped it up, naturally. His answer was clear enough. He says that in all such calculations it's the practice to allow not only a sufficient but a very much more than sufficient margin against accidents. 'But suppose,' I said, 'you cut the usual allowance in half' — you know that's what young Barat says has happened — 'would the result in a general way be safe?'"

"Well, and what did he answer?"

"Just what one would have expected. He said it would all depend on the individual case, but that speaking broadly it was n't by any means certain that there'd be any danger. I gathered that, although he refused to speak definitely, there would n't in the ordinary way be a risk one need be afraid of taking."

"It's a pity you could n't put the exact facts before him. But of course it would be risky."

"Much. You can't trust people not to talk. If one could we'd take a definite opinion from the best man and have the thing examined as far as it is possible — which is n't far, I fancy."

"That's just what I feel myself, Drakelow.... And so, what's to be done?"

"Nothing is to be done with young Barat I'm convinced."

"Then do we tell him to go to the devil?"

Sir Edward Drakelow took time to consider this drastic way of dealing with their difficulties. He now had Lord Butterby exactly where he wanted him, but it would be better if he gave the impression of pon-

dering the advisability of supporting his chairman's suggestion.

"That didn't suggest itself to me as a way out, Lord Buttery, but do you know I think you've hit on the right course. It's not much use arguing with him. Shortly, your view is, then, that there is n't a large enough element of danger to warrant our upsetting everything?"

"Certainly. Your architect told you just what common sense told me. In the first place we can't swear that Barat did make less than the ordinary allowance. We only have young Barat's assurance to go on. And if he did he may have done it on purpose, knowing a damned sight more about building than ninety-nine architects out of a hundred. Then, even if he was guilty of a miscalculation, there the tower is: it does n't show any signs of insecurity; it's been standing for months. What is to prevent it standing forever? It's had time to settle now. Surely the dangerous time would be directly it was finished?"

"Yes, all that sounds logical. And we must n't forget that if Barat had n't died, this question would never have arisen. There his papers would have rested. What right have we, a lot of ignorant laymen, to interfere with them?"

"What, indeed?"

"Well, we are, in your words, to tell young Barat to go to the devil. But what if he starts talking? — and he will, I expect, do some stupid thing of the kind."

The suggestion and its implication hurt Lord Buttery's dignity. The idea that a young man's gossip — for it

could surely be little more — should be allowed to weigh against his conduct seemed to him altogether incredible.

"I think, Drakelow, that you and I and the rest of the Board are strong enough to overcome anything he has to say. He's got nothing that can be considered a proof. It's all technical anyway. There's the law of libel. Is n't our line that he has, as you were saying just now, a bee in his bonnet?"

"Yes, you're quite right. And I'm to treat him on that basis when he comes to see me to-morrow. You would n't like to be there, I suppose?"

"No, I would *not*. I leave him to you. If necessary frighten him. Tell him we'll have to set our solicitors on to him if he goes about talking."

Sir Edward laughed. "I'll do my best. Considering that the alternative is the destruction of the whole property and an enormous loss to all our shareholders, I don't see we have any choice. Well, good - night, Lord Butterby. I hope you'll have a good time in the South. I'd like to get to Cannes myself."

CHAPTER XVI

IN WHICH FAHEY SUGGESTS THE "TRUMPET"

WELL, Mr. Barat, I hope you are better?"
The question was Sir Edward Drakelow's, and Valentine, who though sick at heart had no consciousness of being sick in body, knew at once that he was going to have trouble, and that Lord Butterby and his colleague had in some way or other reconciled it with their duty to show fight. His back stiffened. Not pausing for a reply Sir Edward continued:—

"And I hope you have had time to learn reason. I have, as I said I should do, talked the whole matter over with Lord Butterby. With every wish to be fair to you and to allow for your natural feelings, we have had to come to the conclusion that you lost your head or you would never have come to your father's old colleagues in such a spirit or with such mad demands. All the same, we'll abide by my offer: we will do as I suggested — if, after a few weeks' consideration, you still wish it, we'll have a technical inquiry into the tower and its supports. That ought more than to satisfy you."

Any one showing less signs than Valentine of having lost his head it would be difficult to imagine. He was quite cool: "It does *not* satisfy me, Sir Edward. Far

from it. In the first place I cannot wait a few weeks. It would n't be safe. In the second, no inquiry would be of the slightest use unless it entailed ripping the building open."

"I will, for your father's sake, be patient with you, Mr. Barat, and I will — although it goes against the grain — tell you some of the reasons which weighed with Lord Butterby and me" — and he went on to explain the case for doing nothing, or as much of it as was creditable, as much as he thought it would be good for Valentine to hear.

"Then, Sir Edward, if that is all you have to say, if you have quite made up your mind, it's no use my stopping here any longer. You know what I propose to do. I propose to make the whole thing public."

Sir Edward got up and looked angrily impressive. "Mr. Barat, within limits, of course, you can do what you choose; but have the kindness in your own interests to remember what those limits are. Very few people are likely to believe your cock-and-bull story, and there is such a thing as a law of libel. We shall in our shareholders' interests invoke it unsparingly — but let me add for your own good that most people are likely to take a serious view of your sanity. A son does n't set out to destroy the work of his father's life unless he has lost his wits."

"I must run the risk of all that, Sir Edward. Don't blame me, though, if as a result of your refusal there is much more trouble over this than there would have been if you made it known yourselves."

"I won't, Mr. Barat; but remember the law of libel.

And now I must ask you to excuse me. I am very busy to-day."

Valentine walked westward, disgusted with the world, suspicious now of the integrity of his father's colleagues, convinced, indeed, that both of them were cowards even if they were not swayed by a fear of the effect that the disclosure would have on their own fortunes. It was very obvious that they had hoped to frighten him into silence, and that, failing that, they trusted to his inability seriously to convince the world of the truth of his story. They'd fight, no doubt, with whatever weapons came to their hands. Certainly he'd have to walk warily. Also he'd have to act quickly.

His way — for he had decided to lunch at his club — led him along the Embankment to Charing Cross. As he walked from Blackfriars he could see the soaring tower of his father's building challenging the skies. It had a convincing beauty. And he was to destroy it and his father's name. He remembered how, years ago, he had stood in the Place de la Concorde and had vowed his life to making London more worthy of her destiny. How was he fulfilling his vow? He set his teeth. He had no choice. But he would go once more and satisfy his eyes. For no long time would it be possible to see the glory that his father had wrought. The tower might be built again, but it could never be the same. . . .

The Leicester Square front of the Palace of Empire was as a hive for crowded life. Its sides were as a great cliff pierced with a thousand windows. At one of the doors of the hotel Valentine stopped and spoke to the

porter, an old friend of years ago. The man had been cloakroom attendant at one of the many restaurants which in his callower youth he had been wont to patronise.

"Ah, Mr. Barat, you should hear the Americans: they don't half like our having the biggest building in the world, I can tell you. It's fair put their noses out of joint. I reckon London ought to be grateful to your father, Sir. And I can give you a bit of news, Mr. Barat. I got it just now from my mate who's porter at the flats' entrance. Twins was born in one of the flats this morning. I tell you, Sir, we've got things moving in this here block of buildings. Well, good-day, Sir. I hope we'll see you often, Sir."

The picture of that huge building swarming, pulsing, with varied life, remained with Valentine. Hardly a room in it but had its tenant. The thought of what would happen should the feared disaster come to pass weighed heavily on his spirit. Indeed he had no time to waste.

At his club Valentine found Martin Fahey and joined him at lunch. For a moment the idea occurred to him in his perplexity of consulting that agreeable rattle, but he thought better of it. Fahey was unlikely to be able to suggest anything he could not himself think of, and he wanted until the last moment to spare himself the pain of telling even a single friend of his father's error. Fahey, too, was full of his own affairs, of his approaching marriage, of his official prospects; also he was boiling over with indignation at an attack on his chief which the halfpenny "Planet" was engineering

with great skill and a surprising lack of national pride.

"You can abuse that other halfpenny rag the 'Trumpet' as much as you like, but it *is* patriotic; it does stick up for its own country. It's Tory, of course, when it is n't frankly opportunist, but it's got a point of view — that of the man in the street. And it gets things done. If the 'Trumpet' is on your side, you can — politics apart — be pretty sure you're going to win."

Valentine, whose mind was set on his own preoccupations, had paid very little attention to Fahey's prattle up to this moment, but the mention of the "Trumpet" gave him an idea, and he cross-examined Fahey, who knew a good deal about journalists from the Foreign Office point of view, as to the paper, its proprietor, its staff, and its methods.

"The paper's Mappin, and Mappin's the paper. The man's got a perfectly uncanny nose for what the public want. And he gives it to 'em at any cost. He is n't such a bad chap, either. Works like hell when he's in town and then disappears for months. But from the look of the paper, I should think that even when he's away he edits it by cable."

"Is he in town now, do you happen to know?"

"He was on Wednesday — I saw him lunching at the Savoy with his editor. Why? Do you want to see him?"

"I might — I don't know. Something occurred to me. But I must be off — there's a lot of work to be done in Great George Street since my father's death. See you again."

Walking across the park, Valentine made up his mind. He'd done his best with Lord Butterby; he'd argued with Sir Edward Drakelow. He'd warned them both. Sir Edward had laughed at him, had threatened him, and had ended up by putting his finger on the one weak spot in Valentine's programme. It was all very well for him to determine to do his duty at the cost of his fortune and of his father's name, but what if he could get no one to listen to him? He might talk and talk, and what he had to say might never get beyond the small circle of his acquaintance. People might easily think him a little mad. The Company would brazen the affair out . . . and then disaster would come. In the circumstances any step that achieved his object was justified. Indeed, he must take it whether he liked it or not. He must see Claude Mappin. The "Trumpet" had a voice that would stir a hundred Butterys.

On his desk Valentine found a registered letter: "Came by post-office messenger ten minutes ago, Mr. Valentine," Wilson told him. "It's from Kelk and Kelk, I think: they telephoned while I was out to ask if you were in London and if you'd get a letter if it was sent here at once. Masters told them we expected you about now."

Kelk and Kelk were a famous firm of solicitors, and Valentine opened their letter with some interest. He read it with more. It told him, on behalf of their clients, the Palace of Empire Limited, that if he persisted in the course of conduct with which he had threatened two of the directors, Lord Butterby and Sir Edward Drakelow, he would lay himself open to the gravest consequences,

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and that they begged to remain his most obedient servants. He folded the letter up, replaced it in its envelope, put it in his pocket, and donned his hat again.
"I'm going out at once, Wilson — I'll be back, but I'm not sure when."

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH VALENTINE VISITS CLAUDE MAPPIN

EVERY one knows the "Trumpet." If it has n't the largest circulation in the world it has one of the biggest, and no one organ has a greater influence — perhaps for the simple reason that it has shown no sign of attempting to form public opinion, but is content to follow, or shall I say to crystallise, it. Its little enemies say that it lives by sensation, thereby showing themselves ignorant of the difference between sensation and alertness; or that it is inaccurate — but that is an accusation inspired by ignorance or jealousy. As if a paper with the "Trumpet's" revenue could afford to be inaccurate.

Its editorial offices are very small, very exact, very busy, a gem of Gothic architecture tacked on to the huge building in which its actual production is carried out, a building which shakes with the power of its machines, which is like an ant's nest for stirring energy. Day and night it is surrounded with paper carts, with wagons delivering huge reels of white paper in bulk, with running newsboys. Valentine took his stand on the opposite pavement for a minute and watched the going and the coming. If the "Trumpet" had a message to deliver, the world would hear it.

A grizzled commissionaire who had apparently the capacity for attending to half a dozen things at the

same time, looked doubtfully at Valentine's card and told him he did n't know whether Mr. Mappin was in or not, — "likely not," — but that he'd send it up. In the mean time would Mr. Barat wait in the hall. And he had to wait, weary minute after minute, his stomach churned by anxiety, his mouth dry. Every now and then a boy would come running down the stairs and would look round at those who were waiting and signal to some one luckier than his fellows. Valentine's turn seemed as if it would never come. "Lord bless you, you may have to wait a long time yet," the commissaire told him in answer to his timid inquiry as to whether his card had n't been mislaid. "I expect he's going to see you, or you'd have been told to go away."

From this Valentine got what little comfort he could, but he had to go on waiting. It seemed to him an uncivil method of dealing with visitors. He would n't keep a messenger boy hanging about in such a fashion. And after all the name of Barat should have earned a little more attention. He'd written on his card: "The Palace of Empire. On a personal matter." He made up his mind that if Mr. Mappin could n't listen to him himself, he'd be satisfied with no less important an audience; and then, after a while, he came to the conclusion that he'd wait no longer, that he'd go away and write. Perhaps he was to blame for not having made an appointment. . . .

"Mr. Barat, will you come up?" Valentine looked at his watch; he'd been waiting fifty-five minutes. He was led in no very pleasant frame of mind through a maze of rooms and corridors to the Presence.

His arrival seemed to be exactly timed. Mr. Claude

Mappin stood at the farther door of a long, comfortable, unofficelike room speeding his last visitor. "Tell him that it's no good. I won't let them pay more. We could afford it — oh, yes. But we won't, just as a matter of principle. He could have had the ten guineas if he'd asked for it to begin with, but he said five. To ask more now is a kind of blackmail. You can tell him I said that, too, if you like."

He turned. "Mr. Barat, I am very glad to meet you. A son of your father's is welcome anywhere. I met him once. I wish I'd seen more of him. But excuse me for a moment, will you? I must make a note of what that fellow said. . . . I never saw such effrontery. I really must tell you about it. You know we have a Sunday paper here, the 'Organ.' Well, I thought we ought to have a little religion in it and told Lamont, the editor, to get hold of some bigwig to do a half-column sermon every week. We wrote to Archdeacon Partridge. Oh, yes, he'd do it. Jumped at it. What would we pay? Lamont told him to name his own figure. He did — asked five guineas a week. Lamont wrote accepting — a sermon every week for six months, with the option of going on. Partridge's portrait was to head it. It was to be a regular feature. We advertised it through all our papers — and then a couple of days ago he wrote and said that it entailed more work than he'd anticipated and that he must ask ten guineas. He thought he had us in a cleft stick. He had n't. We've got such a circulation that we would n't miss them if all the people who wanted sermons to read seceded in a body."

Valentine thought he ought to make some comment.

"I suppose you won't have him at all now, not even at five guineas." It seemed a safe remark.

"We're not like that. We wanted Partridge and we'll have Partridge — at our figure. That he's a dishonest fool does n't alter his value to the 'Organ.' But you came to see me on a personal matter, Mr. Barat. Now what can I do for you?"

Valentine had told the whole of his story. Claude Mappin had proved a very good listener. He had made notes and he had asked questions.

"And now you shall go, Mr. Barat. I have a board meeting upstairs in two minutes. What you have told me I shall treat as a confidence. I'll think it over. You want the 'Trumpet' to take up your case. If it does so it will be because it's worth while. We should be helping you, and we should have a scoop for ourselves. I'll know what we can do to-morrow. Come to my house at one and bring with you that box of papers you were speaking of. And in the mean time don't mention this matter to a soul. Remember that the 'Trumpet' is a daily paper and that it wants news." Pausing he held out his hand: "And, Mr. Barat, I'm very, very sorry for you. This must have been a great shock on top of your father's death. I respect you for the course you're taking." He touched an electric bell on his desk. "Show Mr. Barat out, and then tell Mr. Rannie I'll be up in a minute."

Valentine did n't go to bed that night. He walked about the streets that encompassed his father's build-

ing, watching the lights spring up and die down in its thousand windows, seeing the theatres vomit their crowded audiences, the hotel receive its guests, the restaurant get rid of its last visitor. And in a few hours, a day or two at the most, the place would be a desert, all its life stilled, and the hoardings would go up again and the workmen would come. There'd be an end, an end forever surely, of the Barat dream. Such thoughts walked with him through all the dark hours, and the sun came up and found him still eating out his heart.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH CLAUDE MAPPIN SHOWS VALENTINE THE “TRUMPET” PROOFS

PUNCTUALLY at one o'clock a taxi brought Valentine and his father's leather case to Claude Mappin's house in Grosvenor Square. This time he was not kept waiting. His host saw him at once. He was not alone.

“Show me all the plans and drawings you spoke of, Mr. Barat. I see you've got them. Don't mind Mr. Mackenzie here, — Mr. Mackenzie, Mr. Barat, — he's Mrs. Mappin's brother and he's an architect, a Scotch architect with a gift for keeping his mouth shut, — eh, Mackenzie? I want him to see the papers with me. I'm only a layman. Your story convinced me, but that is n't saying much. You might be mistaken. Here, lay them all out on this table and forget Mackenzie is here. Show them to me one by one just as you told me you looked at them the other night.”

Valentine did as he was bid. Claude Mappin seemed to take in what he was told. Every now and then, he would ask some simple question of his brother-in-law. When the last drawing, the last paper, had been looked at, he put a definite inquiry: —

“Now, Harry, you've heard what Mr. Barat has to say; I told you what he said yesterday: you've seen all his father's papers. Does his story hold water?”

"It seems so to me, Claude." The Scot compressed his lips and shook his head. "It's a bad business. I can't see any way out of it. Mr. Barat is right about the risk; he has n't overestimated it. I would n't spend an hour in the Palace of Empire, if I could help it, after what I've heard and seen. Of course, the tower might stand — but it's more likely to come down. Come down it's bound to sooner or later. The directors are fools to run the risk. They ought to be indicted for murder if — when — an accident does happen."

"Then that settles it, Mr. Barat; I'll stand on Mr. Mackenzie's opinion. Now look here." He opened a drawer in his desk and took out three long strips of printed matter. "These are what we call galley proofs. I realised last night that if we were to do any good we'd have to use your story at once, but I did n't want to trust any one in the office with it. It interested me so much, as a matter of fact, that instead of going out last night I sat down and wrote it all out with my own hand — and there's the result. It was put in type this morning. Forgive the headlines. You'll see it's going to have the chief place on page five and it's got to hit the reader in the eye. The 'Trumpet' is a halfpenny paper, remember, and we've always to arrange it accordingly. Sit down and read it quietly and tell me if it's all right."

Valentine took the proofs and sank into an armchair. The first slip had a series of headings in large type, designed evidently to run across two columns. You could n't help seeing them: —

**PALACE
OF EMPIRE**

DISASTROUS DISCOVERY

**DEAD ARCHITECT'S
FATAL ERROR**

THE BUILDING DOOMED

Then followed a most able account of Valentine's visit to the "Trumpet" offices and, in sufficient detail, of what he had to say. Claude Mappin had been a working journalist before he became a newspaper proprietor on his own account and his hand had lost none of its cunning. The narrative was a convincing one. Once grant the possibility of Harvey Barat's making so great an error and the rest followed naturally, inevitably. The last paragraph was for Valentine almost the most important :—

It was not without a very deep sense of responsibility and after the fullest inquiry that the proprietors of the "Trumpet" decided to give this story to the world. To write frankly, they had only too much reason to think that unless the searchlight of public knowledge was brought to bear on the matter the directors of this ill-fated enterprise would temporise, and perhaps

even put off until too late the action which every hour makes more necessary. 'The danger, the hideous danger, of such a course we need not point out. If our story is not true in substance and in fact,— and unhappily we know that it is,— these gentlemen have their remedy.

"So much for Sir Edward Drakelow and his Buttery," Claude Mappin said, as Valentine handed back the slips. "I do not pretend to like those gentlemen, and I like them even less now since I have heard your experience of them, Mr. Barat. Still I don't think that influenced me. 'Their remedy'! I wonder where the 'Trumpet' would stand if you — if we — proved wrong, after all. It's pretty powerful, but if on a mere libel we destroy a property worth millions — and destroy it we shall; it'll never be worth much even when it's rebuilt — the damages would be millions, too. Well, well, it's all in the public interest, I suppose. I can see Montague Shearman explaining that to the jury. I hope they'd listen to him!"

Valentine, now that he had achieved as far as was possible his immediate end, was in no mood for conversation. "I suppose you don't need me any more, Mr. Mappin? When do you say that article appears?"

"To-morrow, of course. And that reminds me: you must lend me two of these papers. This drawing of the concealed arch and this page of figures — the page with the error in it. We'll reproduce them — about half their present size will do. They'll print quite well.

You shall have them back, this evening. I'll send them to your house. They give the right atmosphere. Don't forget you're not to mention this to any one. We're running some risk, so we must make all the sensation we can. London will talk about nothing else to-morrow."

"Well, I shall be gone. I could n't stop to listen to it all."

"Quite natural, I'm sure: I'm going away myself — fishing. [Look here, you may like to see the proof in page. If you go down at eight o'clock and ask for Mr. Rannie, the editor, he'll show it you."

"No, thank you, Mr. Mappin. I never want to see the thing again. I've done what I had to do and that's the end. I'm leaving London by the midnight train and I don't feel like coming back. So thank you, and good-bye. Good-bye, Mr. Mackenzie."

CHAPTER XIX

IN WHICH VALENTINE GIVES HIS SOLICITOR A POWER OF ATTORNEY AND LEAVES GREAT GEORGE STREET

Twas time now for Valentine Barat to take stock of his own position. It was not a happy or encouraging one. A week ago he had been a rich man. His father had left him a fortune. Life and happiness beckoned. To-day that fortune was as good as gone, every penny of it. True, Julie Fenelon had stuck to him, but even so when could he hope to claim her? To get married on the 1st of June, as she had so confidently arranged, was out of the question. Then there was his profession as an architect. Would the name of Barat help him any more? Would n't it be a fatal handicap? He might just as well put up the shutters in Great George Street for all the work that was likely to come to Bellew and Barat after to-morrow's "Trumpet" had appeared.

Perhaps he might count on having at the outside three thousand pounds left when all his father's affairs were settled. It would at three per cent bring in less than a hundred a year. He could n't get married on that. No, he came more strongly to the conclusion that his wisest course would be to shake the dust of England from his feet. He could at least try his fortune in America, in South America, perhaps, for choice. But

there was no need to burn his boats. As long as he got out of London, and away from English people, to-night, he could make up his mind at leisure. Julie Fénélon had anticipated his wish to leave London as soon as he was able to arrange a course of action about the Palace of Empire, and she and her mother had offered to meet him anywhere that he cared to go. They had suggested Brittany, and no sooner had Valentine realised that the "Trumpet" matter was decided than he had made up his mind to leave that very night. He had gone from Claude Mappin's house to the post-office, and had telegraphed to Julie that he would arrive at Brest on the morrow. Perhaps, he said to himself, his going away was cowardly. He did n't know. In any case he could n't help it. It was impossible for him to stay and see his father's name dragged down.

There was much to do, however, before he could leave London. His first visit was to Mr. Hunt, his solicitor. But even to him he could not bring himself to tell the story of his father's error.

"Mr. Hunt, I'm going away to-night. I must go. I'm not in a fit state to stop. You'll tell me, of course, that my going is very inconvenient. All my father's affairs are not settled up yet. That can't be helped. I shall leave you a power of attorney — it can be executed at once, I suppose. I'm not sure where I'm going. It won't be far, but I don't want to have more business follow me than is necessary. There are certain instructions I want to give you: you'll get them in two or three days, and you'll have my address when I write. I won't go into them now. I dare say you won't approve of

them, but I want you to understand that they're unalterable. However, I'll explain it all in my letter. Let's get on with the power of attorney, as I have a lot to do and precious little time to do it in. No, I don't know when I'll be back."

While the necessary document was being prepared, Valentine pretended to read the "Times." In these hours everything he did was made perfunctory by his constant preoccupation over the result of his action. He worked and walked as if in a dream, hating himself and the trap into which fate had led him, but sure that the course he had adopted was the only one that had been open to him. Save from Julie Fenelon he had asked no advice: he had taken no one into his confidence. It was better so. . . .

Mr. Hunt was soon ready for his client's attention. The matter at an end, he could not forbear putting in one word of comment on what Valentine had said: —

"Mr. Barat, you and I don't know each other well. However, your father knew me and he would have known that I shan't abuse this considerable trust. But I'm a little worried at what you said about the instructions you're going to send me. I shan't approve of them you think. And I'm to understand that it's no use arguing with you. Very well, I won't. What you tell me to do I shall do at once if it's in my power. But I hope you'll think very carefully over any important step you're proposing to take. I'm older than you and perhaps I may make one suggestion. If you ask yourself what in any given situation your father would have done, then you certainly won't go far wrong."

Valentine was touched by the solicitor's criterion of sense and folly, of right and wrong, but it gave him no pause. "I ask nothing better than that standard, Mr. Hunt; I'm not going to do anything of which my father would disapprove. It is just because I am sure that if he were able to come back and advise me he'd counsel just the course I'm taking that I tell you not to attempt to change my mind for me. When you hear from me weigh my conduct by just that standard you tell me to adopt, and then I shall be sure of your support. I know one thing: I am fortunate in having you to do my work for me."

"Just one other question, Mr. Barat. You said the other day that it was your intention as soon as ever it was possible to carry out those two plans of your father — the travelling scholarship and the portfolio. Am I to do anything about the scholarship?"

Here was something that Valentine had forgotten. Not even that one pleasure, that one sign of respect for his father's memory, could he save from the wreck.

"I'll have to write about that, too, Mr. Hunt. I won't forget it. And now good-bye."

At Great George Street there was so much that he could do that he ended by doing nothing at all — or almost nothing. Calling Wilson into his room he told him that he was going away, that there were several reasons why he did n't feel up to work at present, and that he was uncertain as to what course he would adopt as to the business in the future. "I want, Wilson," he went on to say, "to tell you now before I go away that I

am setting aside out of my father's estate the sum of a hundred pounds for you. Mr. Hunt will no doubt send it in a few days. I had intended that it should be a very much larger sum, but you'll understand soon enough why that proved impossible. Now I'll say good-bye. Think always as kindly as you can of me, Wilson. I need n't ask you to remember always what was best in my father. You did all you could for me when we were working together. It is n't your fault that I'm not a better architect."

Valentine's handshake was an indication to the head clerk that he wished to be left alone. He was in his own room; he had never had the heart to usurp his father's. He looked round at the things which it was likely now that he was leaving forever, those books of his profession, the pictures on the walls, the desk at which he had sought to work. How little work he had done at it! Whatever else there might be in those drawers, there would be no papers bearing on the business. He pulled one or two of them out. In one was a "Ruff's Guide" and a "Form at a Glance." Sadly he remembered his father's taunt about one of these books. He had deserved it.

He threw them both into the fire, and then left the office, closing the door softly.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH VALENTINE BEGINS HIS PACKING AND BREAKS DOWN AND MARTIN FAHEY IS SYMPATHETIC

VALENTINE looked at his watch. It was only half-past five. He had still six weary hours to pass before he could start for Paddington. He had to pack and to do something in the way of leaving his affairs in order, but he had terror of this last lonely evening. Some one must share it with him. He who had so many acquaintances had so few friends. Fahey alone occurred to him, and Fahey would certainly do better than another, for he knew something of the Barat affairs, and Valentine had it in his mind that try as he might he would not be able to keep silent through the evening. Now that it was irrevocable he must tell some one what he had done. He must in some way open his heart. It was not that he wanted sympathy, but he must talk, he must have some listener. Or he would go mad, he told himself.

Through the telephone he learned that Fahey was busy, but on being pressed and hearing that Valentine was going away that night, — “for I don’t know how long, Fahey, truly I don’t,” — he promised to dress and come round at eight o’clock. He would, however, have to leave at half-past ten. “I can’t get out of taking Millicent to a dance. I’ve got to pick her up at Covent Garden first.”

Well, that would mean society for a couple of hours at least. With that and the packing he would be able to wear the time away.

Valentine, who since he had come down from Oxford had never been from home for more than a few days at a time, found the task of deciding what he should leave much more difficult than he had anticipated. Never a good packer, he had now a hundred perplexities. If, as in the back of his mind he firmly believed, he was going for good and all, then he must take everything he could possibly require and definitely throw away all that he would not need. He opened drawer after drawer, cupboard after cupboard, leaving the things for which he felt he would have no use and throwing those things which he wanted into a heap in the middle of the room. They could be arranged in his various trunks and suit-cases later on. Then he felt he must stop for a while and go through the papers in his desk. He had no secrets, but he had a tidy instinct against leaving so much for other people to do. And so, what with this interest and that, his mind was more occupied than he had anticipated; the time passed swiftly, and it was eight o'clock and Fahey was an amused spectator of the disarray before he had thought of any preparation for dinner.

"You don't know for how long you're going away, Barat? So I should suppose from the appearance of your room. You seem to be getting ready for a complete exodus, from the look of things. Your desk, too. You're turning that out. That's a bad sign. When a man of your age goes through the contents of his desk and

destroys baskets full of paper, you can bet he's contemplating doing something desperate. By the same token, I'll have to go through my desk before I'm a couple of moons older. You know it's settled that we're to be married on June 5?"

Coming downstairs into the better light of the drawing-room Fahey could not help noticing how ill his friend looked. "By Jove, Barat, you do look as if you wanted a change. I'm not surprised. And I'm a selfish devil or I'd have seen if I could n't help you in these last days. I'm jolly glad you're off. Where are you going to, by the way?"

"I don't know, Fahey. I'll tell you after dinner. It's ready. Come on down. It's the first time you've ever dined in this house and I dare say it'll be the last. But let's talk of something else till we come up here again. Tell me all about yourself. That's always a good subject with you. You must n't, whatever you do, let Miss Pell subdue your charming egoism. It would be a national loss." And linking his arm in his friend's he led him down, grateful almost to the point of tears for a little companionship, for the presence of a friend.

The meal was a triste affair. Valentine could n't eat; Martin Fahey, uneasy and anxious at his friend's appearance and worried by an undefinable something in the air, would n't. The parlourmaid went downstairs and told the cook that "Master Valentine was in a pretty bad way. He looks just as if he was sickening. His father did n't look half as ill as he does. And *he* went off quick enough."

The mockery of a meal at an end, Valentine and his

guest returned to the drawing-room. "I'm going to turn out one of these lamps, Fahey. We don't want so much light to talk by. My head aches. Sit there — you've got an hour and a half before you need go." He poked the fire and then moved restlessly about the room, looking first at a souvenir of his mother, and then at some object that lay just as his father had put it down a fortnight ago.

"You're so restless that you're getting on my nerves, Barat. Please come and sit down like a good chap. That's right. Now tell me what's the matter with you and where you're going. I can see there's something the matter. More than your father's death is on your mind. Tell me all about it, old fellow. Perhaps I can help in some way."

For answer Valentine dropped his head into his hands and burst into tears.

Martin Fahey had a share of wisdom. He sat still and let his friend have his cry out. It was, and he could see it was, a case of pure nerves, of nervous exhaustion. Tears were not in Valentine Barat's line. If he wept he did so because he'd come right to the end of his tether, mentally, physically.

After a time Valentine's sobs grew less frequent and then ceased. He looked up:—

"I'm ashamed, Fahey. Please forgive me. I could n't help it. I've gone through hell in the last few days. And I have n't slept. But I'm a fool. I'll tell you what I've suffered and then you'll be less inclined to hold my exhibition against me. . . ."

And he told Martin Fahey everything.

Fahey, when his host, having brought his story up to that afternoon, seemed to have finished, was in no hurry to make any comment. Valentine looked at him anxiously: "Well, what do you think? Do you think I behaved like a fool? Tell me frankly."

"What do I think? If I'd been in your place, Barat, I hope I'd have done exactly what you did. You behaved like a man. It's magnificent. And now I can understand both your wanting to go away and your breaking down. Thank you for telling me, old man. Your father if he could know would be proud of you, and he'd be proud of Julie Fenelon, too. It's jolly sporting of her. I dare say when you get over all this you won't be so badly fixed. After all, you've got some money and, as I always told you, I fancy Julie Fenelon's got a lot. Then you've got your profession. I'll hate your going off to Rio or some other God-forsaken place of the kind, but there ought to be room for an English architect in those parts. And certainly South America is where the money seems to come from nowadays. I'll have to try and get a billet at one of those ministries. Millicent would like to see the world."

Even though Martin Fahey's sympathy could have no practical end, it did Valentine at that moment immeasurable good. It fell like dew on his parched spirits and Fahey's approval was an encouragement in the course he had taken. He had wanted some praise, some recognition to sustain his belief that he was doing what he should do. That he had given way for some minutes to the stress on his nerves, that he had actually broken down, left him more calm, more able to bear the contem-

plation of the grim, grey future that confronted him. For he had brushed on one side in his own mind, and just now in his conversation with Fahey, the suggestion that he was to marry Julie Fenelon and that her money, whatever it was, should help to support him until he could make a place for himself, in South America, or elsewhere, by his profession. "That's impossible, Fahey," he had said. "I can't think of it. I consented against my will to some such mad scheme when I was in Paris, but I could n't carry it out. I should be ashamed. No, if Julie will wait for me, then I shall have something to work for. But I won't marry her till I've got enough to keep her."

At this creditable sentiment, Fahey, looking at his watch, had risen. There was a point at which his quixotism ceased. He was n't prepared to argue the matter — and, besides, it was half-past ten and he must go. Also he had a shrewd belief that both Valentine Barat's and her own future were safe in Julie Fenelon's hands.

"Take my advice, Barat: don't be too cocksure about anything. You can propose till you're tired, but a woman generally has the last word. However, whatever happens count on me. And let me know what you decide. Good-bye, old chap. I wish I had n't to leave you." With a handshake he was gone.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH FERGUSSON COMES DOWN FROM SCOTLAND TO THE EYE HOSPITAL

ALONE again, Valentine returned to his packing. He had n't much to do now, and he had an hour to do it in. The maids were waiting up to see him go, and he was wondering how much he should say to them. Nothing, he thought. For years they'd worked for his father and now they deserved a little respite. He'd write and give them notice, and Hunt could settle things up. That would be the kinder way. He smiled when he remembered how much he was leaving to other hands. But it could n't be helped. "I've done enough," he said; "I'll be lucky now if I catch my train. Thank God to-morrow I'll be out of it all and on the road to starting afresh."

But there was to be an interruption. He had gone down to the drawing-room to fetch a photograph of his mother that had stood on his father's table when he heard the faint ringing of an electric bell in the kitchen. An odd time for visitors, he thought, and went and looked down into the street. Whoever it was had come on foot, and whoever it was should go away without seeing him. In a moment he heard the maid come up and open the front door.

"Is Mr. Valentine at home?"

"Why, Mr. Fergusson, we thought you were safe in

Scotland. Whatever brought you up to London so soon? Mr. Valentine — yes, he's in all right. But you are only just in time. He's off in half an hour. He'll see you, though, I expect."

But here Valentine, who had heard the conversation from the head of the stairs, himself took charge: —

"Come up, Fergusson, come up. I *am* glad to see you before I go. And you'll forgive my telling you that I do go in half an hour, as you were being told. But you can help me or watch me finish my packing. And, Mary, there ought to be an omnibus here from the station in a minute or two. They can come up at once to fetch most of the things. I shall go to Paddington myself in a taxi. Have one here in half an hour. Now come along, Fergusson. It's not the first time you've brought your game leg up these stairs. But things have altered since you were last here."

"Indeed and indeed they have, Mr. Valentine. I was that upset when I saw the news in the Glasgow 'Herald' that I did n't know what to do for days. You'll be remembering that I told you I did n't like the look of your father just before I went. And I told you to take care of him. But you did n't have any chance, nobody had any chance with him. He would do everything himself. He would work and work. But tell me, Mr. Valentine, where are you off to with all this gear?"

For a moment it was on Valentine's lips to tell Fergusson the story of the last week. But looking at his rugged, tired face he could n't bring himself to destroy now with his words all that belief and admiration that were in the old man's eyes. For him Harvey Barat had

been the supreme architect, the great master, the man who could do no wrong; and the Palace of Empire was only less his child, his dream, his achievement than it was his employer's. He would know the truth soon enough. Too soon. Valentine would have given much if, although all the world must know, this old man might be spared the unhappiness the next few days would bring. So he curbed his first impulse:—

"Where am I off to? For a holiday, Fergusson. I had to have one. I'm going to spend it in France quietly, doing nothing, with those two ladies you spoke to the last time we were together—you remember Miss Fenelon, I'm sure. But you have n't told me what you're doing up here, Fergusson. I thought you'd gone to Scotland to rest and to think of all the fine buildings you've worked on. And here you are back again before the fortnight's out."

"You're right, Mr. Valentine. I ought to be there now. But my eyes troubled me so. I think that the shock I got from your father going off so sudden made them bad again. And I'm a stubborn man, Mr. Valentine. I would n't go to those Glasgow doctors—not because they're not good, but because I'd been in the habit of seeing Mr. Tait up here. He near cured me before. So I came up yesterday and went down to the hospital this morning and waited till he arrived. I knew it was his day."

"Well, and did he put you right?"

"Pretty near, pretty near, Mr. Valentine. But I've got to be patient. He put some stuff into my eyes and then covered them over and said I was to stop there for

eight hours without taking the bandage off. So I did — till nine o'clock. And then I came out and had a bit of supper — and where d' you think I had it, Mr. Valentine? Why, in what they call the grill-room of the Palace of Empire Hotel, and a pretty penny they charged me for it; but that did n't matter; I did see the place working. And then I thought I'd hobble down here and look if I could n't find you. I would n't have rung if there'd been no light. And at first I thought there was n't — then I saw a light in the drawing-room."

"Yes, that was lucky: I'd just come down for a second to fetch something. It was just a chance you arrived at the right moment. I was on the point of going up again when I heard your bell."

"Well, I've found you, Mr. Valentine, and have shaken hands with you once more, and now I'll be off to Euston. My train goes at ten minutes to twelve."

"Lots of time, lots of time, Fergusson. There: that's the last bag finished. I don't want to be left alone. You shall stop and have a drink and then I'll start a minute or two earlier and drop you at Euston."

The while this conversation went on, Valentine had been finishing his packing and a man had been helping the maid carry down the many trunks, suit-cases, and bags with which he thought it necessary in the circumstances to travel. At length, however, they were alone. Valentine looked at his watch:—

"We've ten minutes, Fergusson. Toast your toes and tell me if this is good whiskey." He was glad of the old man's company, but he was bent on talking any nonsense rather than let him start again to speak of his

father's virtues. He would n't, he was sure, be able to bear the knife turning in his wound.

"Very good for England, Mr. Valentine. And I drink to you in it, Sir, and to the Palace of Empire, your father's last work, and to your being as great an architect as he was before you finish." Then he fell on a moment's musing.

"We won't find another man like your father, though, Mr. Valentine — I'm content to have known and to have worked with him through all these years. It's always been a great feather in my cap that he trusted me as he did. But he ought to have trusted other people more. He would n't. He tried to do more than any mortal man could do. That was what killed him. Nobody would believe how much work your father could get through without seeming to turn a hair. And he was so fine with it all — he never knew how good he was. . . . But, my gum, he did make mistakes sometimes. Not from carelessness, you understand me, but from sheer inability to do everything. Towards the end I had to keep my eyes open, I can tell you."

Valentine was alert at this last sentence. "What's that, Fergusson? What are you saying? What mistakes did my father make towards the end?"

"Don't you get offended, Sir. I only mean that he found things a little too much for him sometimes, and I had to put him right. It was natural, I tell you: he was beginning to break up. I know now."

"Yes; but what mistakes? Explain, man."

The old Scot chuckled to himself, not seeing, or not caring to see, that his master's son was on edge with

impatience, with excitement. He took his time in answering: —

“Why” — he drawled the word out — “there was that case of the arch under the tower. There ’d have been a fine to-do if any one had known what happened there.”

Valentine sank back. Was Fergusson in his own way another Butterby, another Drakelow? Had he known all the time and just hidden the knowledge?

“What case, Fergusson?” Valentine was speaking sharply now.

The Scot could n’t but realise that he ’d have to answer clearly.

“Why, Mr. Valentine — I’d forgotten you would n’t know about it. I’d tell *you*, but never another soul in the world. People are that foolish, they’d blame your father — as if a man can help a mistake every now and then. That’s what architects have assistants for — to prevent mistakes. But your father would n’t have any proper assistance.”

“Fergusson, tell me all about it. Tell me at once. There is no time to spare.”

“It’s simple, Mr. Valentine. There were several cases like it towards the end. I tumbled to the fact and watched out for them. This was the most serious. You see your father miscalculated — he made a fifty per cent mistake in reckoning out what he ought to allow for the weight of that great tower. I found it out just in time. I’d swear the contractors would never have noticed, and I would n’t have if I had n’t been looking. But I —”

"Did you find out in time? That's what I must know."

"Of course, or would I be sitting here talking to you about it? I found out in time and showed your father, and he just took the correction like a gentleman. Of course, I never told a soul. You see, if I had n't found out, the tower would have been built and it'd have come hurtling down on the rest of the building and precious little Palace of Empire there'd be now. But ought we to go, Mr. Valentine? I must n't miss that train."

Valentine was up already and about the business of getting Fergusson's hat and stick. He ran quickly into the front room. Thank God, the taxi was there.

"Quick, Fergusson; I don't like to hurry you, but it's life and death. You can't catch that train. I'll tell you why in the taxi. You'll stop here to-night. Mary, make up a bed for Mr. Fergusson. He's stopping here to-night, and I'm not going away, after all. But we're going out. Don't wait up for us." And he caught Fergusson up on the lower stairs and helped him quickly into the taxi.

"18b Grosvenor Square — east side. And for God's sake, hurry. I'll pay you treble fare."

The car shot off and whirled round the corner into Abingdon Street. Valentine, his brain a ferment, his temples throbbing, and his heart sick with anxiety, had time to give his companion a rough outline of what had happened. Fergusson took it all in.

"And what are you going to do now, Mr. Valentine?"

There was no time for a reply to his question. With a jerk the taxi drew up at Claude Mappin's door, and Valentine, shouting a "Wait" to the chauffeur, was up the steps and ringing the bell.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH CLAUDE MAPPIN BEING AWAY IT LOOKS
AS IF THINGS WOULD HAVE TO TAKE THEIR COURSE

THERE was, Valentine could see, no light in the hall. No one came to the door. He went back to the pavement and looked at the front of the house. It slept. Again he rang the bell. It was impossible that every one should be asleep. It was barely half-past eleven. Well, they must wake. He held his finger on the button for several seconds and then tried the effect of several short quick rings. At last he was rewarded. A light sprang up at the back of the hall and he heard the bolts being shot back. The door opened and disclosed the desiccated person he had seen earlier in the day, attired this time in what might be one of his master's discarded dressing-gowns.

"I must see Mr. Mappin at once. It's a matter of business, of life and death."

"You can't, Sir; he went to Norway this afternoon."

Valentine attempted no explanation. He turned at once and was on the curb telling the chauffeur to drive like hell to the "Trumpet" office before the sleepy servant had time to recover from his surprise. "Well, he's in a hurry, he is," he muttered to himself as he closed the door.

The taxi was racing through Carlos Place. There was a deal of theatre traffic going in the other direction.

Anxious to earn a record fare, the chauffeur was taking risks. "Hurry, but don't do that," Valentine, hanging out of the window, shouted to him. "Go down Arlington Street and into Pall Mall and on to the Embankment. You'll avoid a lot of traffic that way."

Then he turned to Fergusson. "What am I going to do, Fergusson? God knows if there is anything I can do. It may be too late. I wanted to catch Mr. Mappin so that he could stop that article appearing, but he's away. We'll get to the 'Trumpet' office directly; then I shall see."

Down Northumberland Avenue they tore and along the Embankment. What chance could he have of stopping the article? The editor had never seen him. How could he prove his identity? He had letters in his pocket. Would they be enough? The commissionaire would know him from his visit of yesterday. But, of course, he was a day man; he would n't be on night duty. He wished to God he'd had the sense to do as Mappin had suggested. He'd have been at the office then that very evening, and would n't now be a stranger. The taxi turned off the Embankment into the humming region of Whitefriars. "You'll wait in the taxi, Fergusson. Perhaps you'll be wanted."

It was a different commissionaire. Valentine spoke breathlessly: "I want to see Mr. Rannie at once. It is a matter of the greatest importance."

"All right, Sir, I'll send up your card. Take a seat." He spoke with deliberation, as if hurry was n't known in the "Trumpet" building.

Valentine kicked his heels for two minutes, and then:

"I can't wait. I *must* see Mr. Rannie. You don't understand — it's very important to the paper."

The commissionnaire looked at him. "Most things are. I've sent up your card. That's all I can do. You need n't wait if you don't want to."

Five minutes more passed, and then the boy who had gone up sauntered slowly down. Valentine hurried forward.

"Mr. Rannie's gone," the boy said, "but Mr. Potter'll see you if you like."

"Very well, but hurry," — and Valentine tried to hasten his young guide.

"The editor's not here; he does n't often stop so late, Mr. Barat. I'm the news editor. Potter's my name. Mr. Mappin left word you might come down to see that article, but of course it's all printed off now." He went to the door. "Here, boy, run up and ask Mr. Sangwin for the page with the Palace of Empire stuff on it. You see, Mr. Barat, we print off some of the paper earlier than the rest. But your stuff's all right. I read it earlier in the evening. It'll make a sensation, and no mistake. You shall see what it looks like."

"Mr. Potter, I've just been to Mr. Mappin's house to tell him I've found it's all wrong, that article. But he's gone to Norway. It must be stopped."

Mr. Potter looked serious, and smiled in a rather sickly way. He had only recently been promoted to his present position and disliked responsibility. However, there seemed no question of what his duty was in this case. His whole future hung in the balance, and he did n't know it.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Barat, but it's too late to make any alteration. As I told you, the paper's printed off — over a million copies if we count Manchester in. We print in Manchester, too, you know."

CHAPTER XXIII

TOUCH AND GO

VALENTINE was calm. His brain, so hot till a minute before, had gone cold. If he was to win, he must conquer this journalist by the force of his words. He spoke slowly. It was better that what he had to say should have time to sink in. Obviously the battle was not now a question of hurried seconds.

"Mr. Potter, this is your room, but I'm going to ask you to sit down and to listen to me. You may be busy, but there's nothing more important for you or for the 'Trumpet' to-night than what I've got to tell you. An hour ago my father's chief assistant, his foreman so to say, came to see me by chance. He's waiting for me now outside in the taxi. From him I learned that the mistake which Mr. Mappin's article described did occur, but that he discovered it just in time to prevent its being made in the building itself."

Mr. Potter, whose brain worked with professional rapidity, and who was thinking that he could see a second scoop for his paper in this new development — for just at the moment that all the world would be discussing the news of the morning, the "Evening Trumpet" could come out with a dramatic description of how at the last moment the building was saved — broke in: —

"I've told you you're too late, Mr. Barat. You are —

as far as to-morrow's 'Trumpet' is concerned. I am sorry for you, but it can't be helped. But I can see a way of assisting you. We can tell the revised story in the evening paper. Its first edition comes out soon after breakfast. Let me send down for the gentleman you say is waiting and we'll get the whole thing written out."

"If, Mr. Potter, you would allow me to finish what I was saying I'd be glad. You don't, as far as I can judge, understand the seriousness of all this to the 'Trumpet.' Now pay attention. You say I'm too late, that a million copies of the page with this stuff on it have been printed off. Of course, it would be a serious thing for you to waste them. Now, first, can you get to Mr. Rannie on the telephone? I suppose you'd rather shift the responsibility of all this."

"Any ordinary day I could, but I know he's not at home to-night."

"Very well. We must settle it between us. I come now to my second point. You *are* going to waste those copies. You don't, perhaps, realise that I talked the whole matter over with Mr. Mappin. The one thing that justified him in coming out with this article was that the thing was so urgent, that delay might mean the loss of thousands of lives. But he knew he was running a risk. Think of the libel laws, Mr. Potter" — Mr. Potter showed that the admonition had struck home: the last things he liked to think of were the libel laws. "The Palace of Empire is run by a Company with a capital of millions of pounds. Now if you come out with that article the building will be ruined. Your evening

paper can have the most convincing contradiction, but there'll always be people who won't believe it, who'll insist that it is a mere hushing-up, a gambling with the facts. You can see what I'm leading up to. The Company will bring an action against the 'Trumpet': it'll be shown that I warned you; it'll be shown that you paid no attention to my warning because you'd started printing. Think of the damages they'll get. You may imagine that a contradiction in the evening paper, after the harm has been done, won't help you much. Mr. Mappin is n't likely to be pleased with you, Mr. Potter. Whereas if you show a little courage and stop the going-out of those copies, you'll have saved him hundreds of thousands of pounds at the cost of a few hundreds, I suppose."

Mr. Potter looked as if Valentine's argument was making some impression on him, but he said nothing. He was evidently thinking. Valentine had a happy thought. He put his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out an envelope: —

"You've heard of Kelk and Kelk, have n't you, Mr. Potter?"

Mr. Potter had. In such a matter the name had on him the same sort of effect as that of Lewis and Lewis has in those few newspaper offices which have not had the foresight to employ that eminent firm.

"Read what they wrote to me yesterday."

The news editor took the letter. It decided him. He nodded with closed lips, and, going to his desk, took up a telephone receiver.

"I want Manchester. . . . Hello. . . . Is that you,

Macintosh? It's Potter speaking. Look here — this is very important. The Chief's away and the Editor's off God knows where. You've read that Barat stuff? What's that? You printed a lot extra because of it. So did we. But I've got Mr. Barat's son here, — the one the Chief had the story from, you know, — and the long and short of the matter is we've got to kill the whole edition. There is n't a word of truth in it, he tells me now. It was all a misapprehension. Yes, I'm responsible. I'll write you a letter at once to that effect. I can't stop now; I have our printing to think of."

Valentine was breathing freely again. The news editor turned to him: —

"You've got a head on your shoulders, if I may say so, Mr. Barat. You've saved me making a silly ass of myself. It'd have cost me my job sure enough if you had n't put the matter so straight. I should have had to go back to the provinces. As it is, perhaps, thanks to you, it'll do me a bit of good. I'm going to turn you out of this room now — but before you leave the office I must ask you to write down for me exactly what did occur between you and your father's foreman. I'll have to give it for Mr. Rannie to send on to the Chief. And I'll keep this letter to show him, too."

Fergusson had done so much waiting for the senior Barat that it seemed to him not at all unnatural that he should now be kept waiting indefinitely for the new head of the firm. Indeed, he drew comfort from the time he was being kept — it showed that something was being done. Pray God Mr. Valentine had not been too

late. It was a full hour before he knew, and then he was told only the bare fact that Mr. Barat's reputation was saved, that his great work was n't doomed.

"Don't talk to me, Fergusson. I've had enough. For God's sake, let's get home and get to bed." Valentine lay back exhausted.

CHAPTER XXIV

AND LAST

JULIE FENELON and her mother were at their lunch in a Brest hotel when a telegram was brought to their table. It read:—

“Nightmare over darling palace all right mistake
was corrected before building begun had to postpone
departure coming via Paris night train Valentine.”

Julie clapped her hands. “Oh, Mamma, I am so glad. Just think. Oh, but you don’t know what it means. I had n’t told you.” And then she launched off into the whole story. It had a depressing effect on Mrs. Fenelon for a little while. The danger was presumably over now, but she had no mind for seeing her daughter married to a penniless although admirable young Englishman. Apparently, however, Valentine Barat had after all a whole eighty thousand pounds. That was more than she had expected. He and Julie could do very well on that.

In the morning Valentine arrived. Julie went down alone in the hotel omnibus to meet him. One of the best points about a French station is that you are under no necessity to conceal your emotions. He lifted her off her feet with the happiness of his embrace.

"March is nearly over — then there's April and May,
and we're to get married on June 1; is n't that so,
Julie?"

"It is — if I can get my clothes ready in time."

THE END

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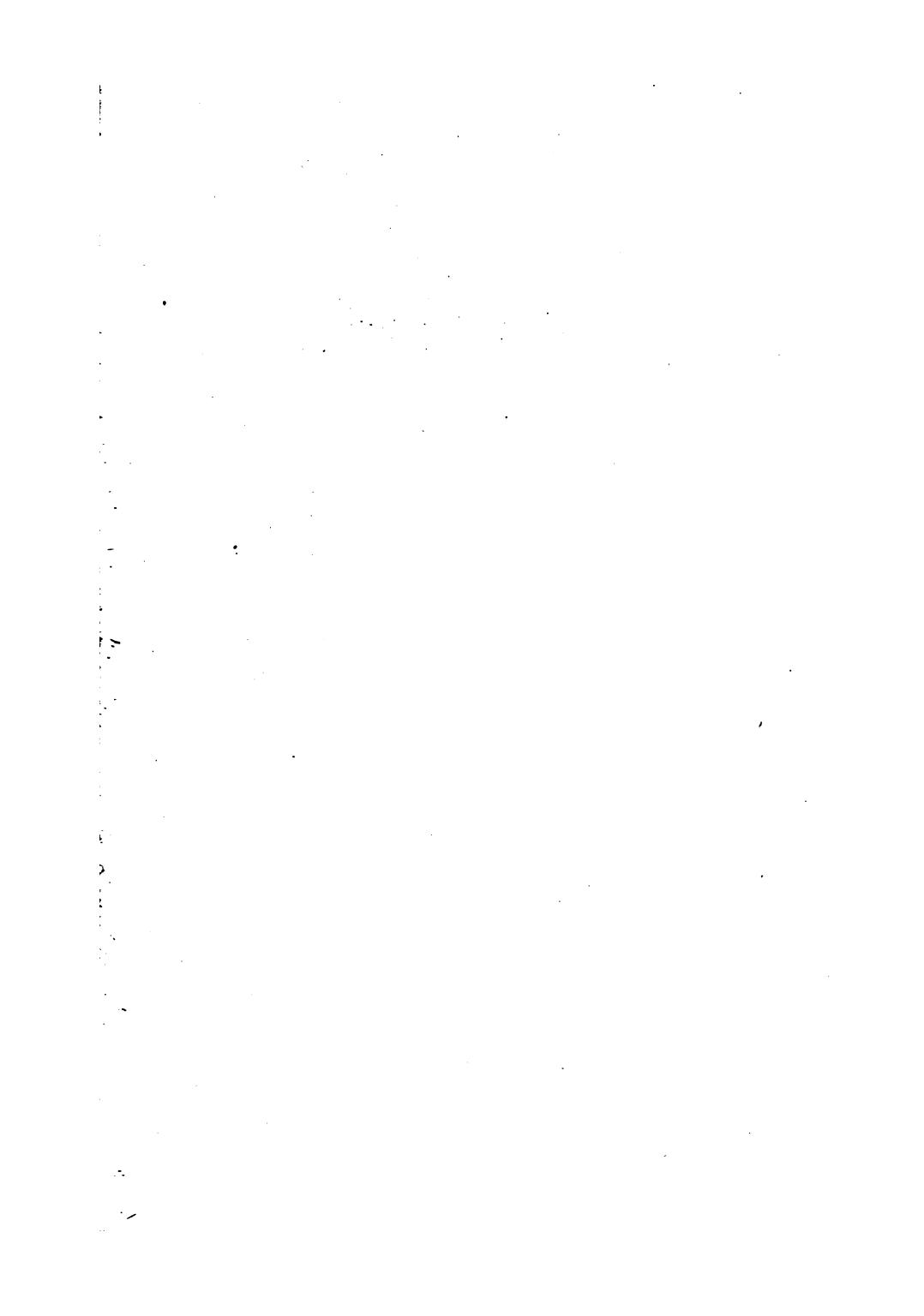
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